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QUEEN JEANNE OF NAVARRE



Photo by A. Giraudon.

Queen Jeanne d'Albret (1570)
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Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre

QUEEN JEANNE OF NAVARRE

Patrick Francis
BY
P. F. WILLIAM RYAN
Author of "Queen Anne and Her Court" etc.

WITH 17 ILLUSTRATIONS, INCLUDING
A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE

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PREFACE

TO a great palace-fortress, desolation in the midst of desolation, they brought a little girl straight from her mother's arms, and there established her as a Prisoner of State.

The little girl was Jeanne d'Albret, afterwards Queen of Navarre, and the tyrant was her uncle, the splendid egotist, the reckless, proud, and debonnair, Francis I. of France.

A few brief years passed, and then one day Francis bethought him of the little maid. Cares oppressed him, cares of his own making, and now he remembered that her dainty hand could charm all his doubts away. He would marry her to his ally of the moment, the Duke of Cleves, and by the sacrifice do good service to his own country and the reverse to the Emperor.

But this child, bred up in loneliness, with the forest-depths as her playground, had the spirit of a lioness. She would not be wedded. To the tyrant's face she defied him; and the imperious despot must have been amused to see such spirit in a tiny damsel whom he could do with as he would. Than little

Jeanne, there never was a braver rebel. But her fight was all in vain. She would die before taking a step towards the altar. As if that mattered! To her apartments stalked the famed Montmorency, Constable of France, and taking in his arms a bundle of cloth-of-gold and shimmering jewels, gay raiment to veil a child's aching heart, he returned to the sanctuary and there, before King and nobles and simpering dames, set down the child-bride for the sacrifice.

At this time Jeanne was only eleven years old. At an age when impressions are ineffaceable she had found herself deserted by all who should have sustained her. It was a lesson in self-reliance that cost an inestimable price. She had learned too soon to stand alone, and in doing so all the gentle weakness, all the tender dependence of womanhood at its sweetest, seems to have been eliminated from her nature.

Her marriage with Cleves was only a marriage in name. As soon as Cleves disappointed Francis, his Majesty applied to the Holy See for a decree of nullity, which after careful investigation could not be withheld.

Jeanne was once more free. Once more some chance of happiness was hers. But the gods had ranged themselves against her. Born under an unlucky star, no power on earth could withdraw her from its influence. For the second time she married

the wrong man. In childhood the King had sacrificed her. In the morning of her womanhood she sacrificed herself. Her union with Antoine, first Prince of the House of Bourbon, was prolific in wellnigh every disappointment, in wellnigh every humiliation that could wound a woman's heart and turn her blood to gall. It brought her only one blessing, the children whom she adored.

Her father's death made her mistress of a kingdom which was the most important of the second-rate Powers of Europe. And Antoine found himself a King. But his new dignity was too exalted for his shallow wits, his feather-head, and soon he was immersed in plans to sell his Consort's country to the French.

In this emergency Jeanne evinced a suppleness of intellect that marked, perhaps, in the same degree, no subsequent phase of her career. She met craft with craft, and, well served by her gallant people, baffled her husband and the enemies who inspired him. Navarre would not be sold, even by its King.

To Antoine nothing was serious. Early in his married life he began to pose as a patron of the Huguenots. For Jeanne, no diversion could be more embarrassing, for it exposed her to the danger of a Spanish invasion. But Antoine could be nothing for long. He was by turns Huguenot and Catholic, Catholic and Huguenot, until his changes of faith became the stock-comedy of his nation. Meanwhile,

Jeanne changed once and changed for ever. For the little girl who had defied a great King in her schoolroom there was no going back. She would die at the stake first.

The relations of Jeanne with Catharine de' Medici form one of the most attractive phases of her career. Catharine did not love Jeanne. She could not afford to do so. Jeanne would not indeed permit her to do so ; for her ambition required sterner tribute. But, again and again, Catharine stood between the House of Albret and misfortune. That the time chosen by Jeanne in which to make open profession of the Huguenot faith should be that in which Catharine attained to some semblance of regal power had therefore, perhaps, an obvious significance. Whether she counted upon Catharine's friendship or indifference in such matters, the result was, however, the same. For France made no attempt to punish by force of arms Jeanne's innovations.

Jeanne, in her early years, had drunk deeply of the chalice of oppression. During her married life, misfortunes crowded upon her. One child died ; another was killed by a foolish maid. Her father's anger threatened her with the loss of her inheritance. Her husband was utterly without sympathy for her. In the camp he forgot her ; and at last, at the French Court, he not only forgot but betrayed her, surrendering his worthless fickle heart to the keeping of another. Thus the scourge was never from her

shoulders. In the school of suffering she was bred ; and from its portals she never emerged until the portals of the tomb enclosed her.

The school of suffering is the school of wisdom, of sympathy, of pity, the school of the saints. But therein Jeanne learned few of its choicest lessons. A tyrant-king had made her weep in childhood ; yet the day came when she too played the tyrant. She tore down the altars that were dear to her people. She plundered their sanctuaries. She confiscated the estates of those who asked but that liberty of conscience which she allowed to herself. The homes and the happiness of those who remained staunch she placed at the mercy of village fanatics. The scourge, instead of teaching her wisdom, had driven her to distraction. Her sword-arm was not long enough to reach her enemies, and, perversely, it fell upon those near who loved her.

In the end Fate was a little kind to her. The din of strife ceased. The peace of exhaustion settled on France. During the lull the young king pressed forward with all possible dispatch the negotiations for the marriage of his sister with the Heir to Navarre. But on Jeanne's side there was no eagerness. Whether or not France intended it, she was satisfied that this marriage would mean disaster to the policy to which she had devoted her life, for which she had wrecked it. Her intuition was correct, but she was not spared to know it. Almost on the

eve of the marriage she was struck down with illness. Worn with strife in the field and in the Council, worn too with the ravages of a deadly malady, she could make no fight for life. And within a few days, with unfaltering courage, with unbroken will, the woman who had been the guide and mainstay of the greatest captains of her age and the inspiration of their armies, had closed her eyes for ever. Perpetual night had enveloped her with all her work undone.

P. F. W. R.

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Queen Jeanne of Navarre

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF ALBRET

Nôtre Dame du bout du pont
Aidez-moi à cette heure! . . .

IN the time-worn Château of Pau this old Gascon hymn to Our Lady rang bravely out on the 13th of December 1553.

"Nôtre Dame . . . Aidez-moi!" sang a woman's voice, and a servant keeping vigil near by, whose duty it was to listen for some such signal, made haste to the master of the château, King Henry of Navarre, to warn him that the hour of his long-cherished hope had come, that Fate was conferring a new lease of life and power upon his dynasty.¹

The singer was the King's daughter, the Princess Jeanne, the Heir-Apparent of Navarre. And in this hour, when all who loved her race hoped for a son to be born to her that its ancient name might endure, this old hymn of the mountains was on her lips, the fulfilment of a strange compact.

Old King Henry had said to the young wife that he wanted no peevish girl or drivelling boy as heir to the kingdom.

¹ Muret, "Histoire de Jeanne d'Albret."

"You see this box?" he said to her, holding before her a gold casket. "It shall be yours provided that when your hour comes you sing me a Gascon song!"

Her hour had come, and here was the Princess carrying out a bargain which her father had doubtless made in jest, and without serious thought that ever a woman in Navarre could so acquit herself.

The Princess sang to the end, and the King's desire was fulfilled. His beloved Jeanne had not disappointed him. She had given him a grandson, and had literally sung the boy into the world.

If the legend be true (and no historian doubts it), one may regard it as the most illuminating episode of the Princess's whole career. A certain stubborn devilry was the very essence of her being, and to the end no pang of mind or body could humble her proud spirit or reduce to compliance her imperious will.

Jeanne lived during a period when woman played a more commanding part in affairs than perhaps at any later time. Elizabeth and Mary were successive Queens of England. France had for its history the history of the Duchess of Étampes, of Diana of Poitiers, and of Catharine de' Medici. Mary of Scotland had come to divide the world into two factions that were never to be reconciled. Each of these combined some weakness of the woman with the qualities that raised them above the common level. But Jeanne in her strength and weakness was always masculine. Soldier, statesman of a kind, tyrant on occasion, no man of her stern age was

made of sterner stuff or cast in more fearless mould than this Lady of Navarre.

The Royal House of Albret was one of the most ancient in Europe. During the Middle Ages, by marriage and conquest, they had extended their domains. But early in the sixteenth century its power was wellnigh shattered by Ferdinand of Castile, who, at a blow, cut the Kingdom of Navarre in twain and added to his dominions the southern half.

Ferdinand's policy threw the House of Albret into the arms of France. In Paris, the weaker State sought a shield from further aggression on the part of Spain. Her overtures were cordially welcomed, and all that she asked conceded at some cost to her independence.

Old Henry, Jeanne's father, he of the gold casket, had been in his earlier years a favourite at the Court of France. There he had married one of the most courted Princesses of the House of Valois, and during the years that followed he must at times have been provoked to repine at his good fortune.

His brilliant and mortifying conquest was Margaret of Angoulême, sister of Francis I. of France, a woman devoted to letters and to men of letters, and herself a writer fired with more of industry, perhaps of vanity, than of genius.

Francis was the life-long rival of the Emperor Charles V., and out of that rivalry arose, in some measure, the circumstances that led to the marriage of Jeanne's parents.

Francis had been taken prisoner at the battle of

Pavia, and was carried into Spain to await in captivity the fortune of war. On that disastrous day the Duke of Alençon, first husband of Margaret, fled from the field. It was his last claim to mention in history. Liberty was the reward of his cowardice. But life to enjoy it was not spared him for long, and the bewitching Margaret was soon a widow, once more free to be wooed and won.

Young Henry of Navarre—who, like Francis, had been taken prisoner at the battle of Pavia—was destined to be the successful suitor.

Henry was only twenty-two, and, according to the chroniclers, was one of the most highly accomplished princes of his day. That is to say, he could not only acquit himself bravely in the lists or in the field, but he also had some acquaintance with classical literature. For so precious a hostage, lord as he was of the passes leading from Spain to the heart of France, no ransom would be accepted. He was therefore left to languish in captivity in the Castle of Pavia.

But, happily for the King, his gaolers, unlike their masters, could not resist the sight of gold. His quarters were towards the summit of the highest tower. Thither a rope ladder was smuggled to him, and the way was clear to freedom were he but bold enough to embrace it. At the last moment, however, the adventure proved almost too much for the nerve of one who ought to have been steeled to dizzy perils on the precipitous slopes of the Pyrenees. But the man who had contrived the plan, one Francis de Rochefort, managed also to overcome the King's

fears; and when the time came, the Royal captive staked life and fortune on a hazard for which he had no liking.

At midnight on the 20th of December 1525 the rope ladder was made fast within the King's apartment. The hour had come for Henry to take leave of his hosts. Disguised as a page, he clambered out into the night, and the long descent began to he knew not what, for, late as was the hour, the motley garrison was still wide awake. The courtyard beneath the runaway King swinging in the shadows of mid-air was thronged with soldiers. But when at last he touched earth, none espied the Royal fugitive beneath the trappings of the page. Perhaps gold had helped to blind the guard. But, at all events, unchallenged, he passed on his way, with no other escort than a couple of gallant mountaineers from his native land.

Next morning the Captain of the Guard entered his bed-chamber to assure himself that all was well with his august captive.

The curtains were drawn. A page said his master slept. For hours and hours that sleep continued, and when discovery came at last, Henry was far beyond the reach of pursuit, drawing nigh to France and safety. By Christmas Eve he was at Lyons, the hero of the hour.

Thanks largely to the tireless efforts of Margaret of Angoulême, the Treaty of Madrid was signed in January 1525. Her adored brother, King Francis, was restored to liberty, and the fair widow's heart was eased of a burden which made it possible for her to think of love again.

Whether Henry of Navarre was taken for love or as a matter of convenience, who can tell? Perhaps there was something of both in the compact. Devoted to her brother, this marriage offered to the Princess the allurements that she would never be far removed from the French Court. Moreover, Henry was a gay and bold and dashing cavalier, of whom any woman might be enamoured. If indeed he had any defect from the lady's point of view, it was that he was rather young, and of a reckless and domineering temper, which would be apt to resent the curb of French suzerainty when it should make itself felt upon his very hearth.

The marriage of Henry and Margaret took place in January 1527, and the bridegroom was henceforth in leading-strings held by a mighty brother-in-law who exacted adoration from his sister, and now expected unquestioning homage from her lord.

Just a year later, on the 7th of January 1528, while Margaret was lying at Fontainebleau, pining for her husband but still more for her brother, the little girl was born to the newly wedded pair who in time became Queen Jeanne of Navarre.

The idolised brother who was everything to the mother was destined for long to be the master of the new-born child's destinies.

Jeanne's infancy was passed under the care of Aymée de la Fayette, Baillive of Caen. But barely had she ceased to be an infant when the King of France charged himself with her wardenship; for this tiny, prattling maid enjoyed the distinction of being more to Francis than gold or legions. Jeanne

was heiress to the crown of Navarre. The birth of a son might, of course, exclude her from the dignity. But meanwhile the right of succession was hers, and it was of paramount importance to France that her husband should be a loyal ally, if possible a vassal of the House of Valois.

For a time the girl was indeed eclipsed by the birth of a brother. A brief eclipse, however! The good Baillive was given the care of the babe. It was an age when little was known of the art of tending the faint spark of infant life and fanning it into flame. The Baillive was no wiser than her generation. And one morning a placard, shown on the walls of the Castle of Alençon, announced that death had passed by the sister and taken the Prince; that the little girl had emerged once more into the foremost place.

Jeanne's childhood was passed at the Château of Plessis-les-Tours. This gloomy palace-fortress, surrounded by dense forests, was more suitable for the custody of a prisoner of State who was best forgotten than as the home of a little girl who would one day wear a crown. But though the establishment at Plessis was maintained on a scale worthy of the niece of the King of France, the child was in grim truth a prisoner, and would so continue until, by marriage with a Prince of the Blood Royal of France, or at all events with a Prince docile to French influence, the vassalage of her country had been ensured for another generation.

It was an age when childhood ended early. For Jeanne it ended earlier than was usual even for a

princess. The King at one time intended her to be the consort of his second son, the Duke of Orleans. Had this design been fulfilled, the whole history of France, and goodness knows what other history, had been utterly changed. But politics counted for more than his niece's happiness or the dignity and pride of her parents. Politics indeed counted for everything. Orleans was given as his bride the Pope's niece, Catharine de' Medici, while Jeanne was held in reserve for the first emergency which could be turned to advantage with the aid of a lady's hand.

Jeanne was only twelve when the emergency arose. The Duke of Cleves appealed to the Emperor to confirm to him the investiture of the Duchy of Gueldres. Charles V., however, had other views for the Duchy, which he would incorporate with the Netherlands. He therefore refused the investiture, and the young Duke turned to Paris to seek military aid against his suzerain. Francis, always ready to coquette with any enterprise that would cause the Emperor disquiet, undertook to provide troops in the Duke's service, and, as a signal blow to Charles, proposed to give him a permanent foothold on the frontiers of Spain itself by bestowing on him the hand of little Jeanne.

The betrothal was no less a blow to the girl's father than to the Emperor. The King of Navarre had a far more splendid alliance in view for his daughter. He would mate her with no less a personage than the Emperor's son, afterwards famous as Philip II. of Spain. His wife loved the French



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a contemporary drawing in the Arras Collection

WILLIAM, DUKE OF CLEVES

King with a passion that amounted wellnigh to idolatry. Such exaggerated devotion could not fail to react on her relations with her husband, who thus for personal reasons was eager to escape from the tutelage of France. But political reasons were not wanting, and were in themselves overwhelming. The cardinal aim of Henry's policy was to recover for his dynasty Upper Navarre, the province which had been torn from the Albrets in the days of Ferdinand. A marriage between Jeanne and Philip would do this and more, for it would make his daughter mistress in due time of the greatest empire in the world, and the House of Albret supreme in Europe through its alliance with the Hapsburgs.

Henry's chagrin made no difference, however, to Francis. Nor did it influence him that Margaret, despite her slavish subjection to his every whim, was averse to having Cleves for a son-in-law. Francis made no effort to win over Henry; and as for Margaret, what he willed was law to her.

There was one, however, to whom his Majesty's will was not law. This was the little bride-elect, the little prisoner of Plessis. Her mother was wax in her mighty uncle's hands. Her father dare not raise a finger in her defence; to do so would have been his ruin. But the girl knew not fear. She was only twelve, but she was ready to beard even Francis himself. She was content with her nursery and her playthings; she wanted no husband. The Duke was handsome, brave, young, master of great territories, allied with great houses, for one sister was Consort of Henry VIII. of England, the other of the Elector

of Saxony. But Jeanne was not to be dazzled by his rank or wealth or kindred. The old Castle of Plessis rang with her lamentations; and, to the King's face, she boldly declared that in this, at all events, she would never obey him. The girl's mother was horrified at her daughter's disobedience, and, true to her part of having no will or pleasure save her brother's, wrote to Francis this letter of abject apology:

"Monseigneur," she wrote, "in my extreme tribulation I experience but one consolation, which is the certain knowledge that neither the King of Navarre nor myself feel other desire than to obey you, not only in the matter of this marriage, but in all that you command us.

"Having heard, Monseigneur, that my daughter, not appreciating as she ought the great honour which you confer by deigning to visit her, nor the obedience which she owes you—neither, that a maiden ought to have no will of her own—was bold enough to utter so senseless a request as to beseech that she might not be married to Monsieur de Cleves. . . .

"Monseigneur, I am overpowered with grief, and have none in the world to whom I can apply for comfort or counsel. The King of Navarre is also astonished and grieved, that I have never seen him before so indignant; for we cannot divine whence this great boldness on her part arose, she never having even mentioned such a design to us.

"She excuses herself on the plea that she is on more intimate terms with you than even with our-

selves ; but this intimacy ought not to inspire so great a freedom on her part, being, as I believe, not advised to it by any one.

“ If I could discover the personage who inspired her with such an idea, I would make so great a demonstration of my displeasure as should convince you, Monseigneur, that this foolish affair has been attempted without the sanction and desire of her parents, who have no will but yours.

“ Knowing, therefore, Monseigneur, that it is your habit rather to pardon errors than to punish them—especially where the understanding fails, as it has evidently done in this case of my poor daughter—I entreat you very humbly, Monseigneur, that for one unreasonable petition she has preferred, and which is the first fault she has committed in respect to yourself, you will not withdraw that parental favour which you have ever manifested towards her and ourselves ; but, considering the many perfections which God has endowed you with, you will bear with our infirmities without displeasure.

“ If the dread of your anger makes your subjects tremble, believe, Monseigneur, that it smites us with death ; for you could not visit us with a more severe punishment than to withdraw your favour, which we have ever prized above kingdoms or treasure whatsoever.”¹

The distracted mother also appealed to her little girl to yield ready obedience to her uncle the King. But no two persons could be more unlike than mother

¹ “ Life of Margaret of Angoulême.”

and daughter. The former, a weak and vain and shallow woman, could be heroic only in the midst of applause and flattery. Jeanne, on the other hand, was born to stand alone. Her mother tried to touch her heart. But when her pride was roused, when her spirit had been goaded into obstinacy, Jeanne had no heart to be touched. To her mother's petitions, therefore, she was adamant. To the polite convention that a maiden should have no will of her own, the maiden of Plessis sent back defiance to the death. If, she said, they persisted in marrying her to Monsieur de Cleves, such tyranny would break her heart, and they would have upon their heads the blood of their only child!

CHAPTER II

THE CONSTABLE OF FRANCE CARRIES JEANNE TO THE ALTAR

JEANNE having proved obdurate to her mother's appeals, an attempt was made to browbeat the little girl into submission. But Margaret set herself a hopeless task—how hopeless, she was incapable of understanding ; for in her range of vision what the King wished, what the King willed, was hardly less imperative than the will of God. Even the terrors of the whip were invoked, but invoked in vain ; for, as almost invariably happens in the case of a proud and rebellious spirit, the young Spartan was the more confirmed in her purpose the more unfeeling the measures employed to enforce obedience.

A weaker nature would have found refuge in deception ; but little Jeanne never dreamt of such cowardice. She did not want a husband. Above all, she did not want Monsieur le Duc ; and no power on earth could make her play the part of the willing bride.

When Margaret wrote to the King that her husband shared her grief at Jeanne's perversity, she may have given what she thought to be a faithful account of Henry's sentiments. But if so, she must have sadly neglected her wifely opportunities for penetrating his

secrets. There can be little doubt that Jeanne was sustained in her resolution by the counsel and encouragement of persons in her suite. That these persons dared not act as they did of their own initiative is certain; and, casting around for the source whence they derived courage and inspiration, one necessarily fixes upon some high and interested personage, who could be no other than the girl's father.

If Margaret was ignorant of her husband's intrigues, Francis was not. It is indeed said that the Cardinal de Grammont, Archbishop of Bordeaux and Governor of Guienne, actually discovered correspondence passing between the King of Navarre and the Emperor, and at once apprised Francis, who was therefore confirmed in his determination to marry Jeanne with all possible dispatch.¹

Disdainful of her father's intrigues, Francis proceeded with the negotiations for the marriage. But Jeanne, though practically the French King's prisoner, was not without friends, and aided by them the child took measures to secure the ultimate victory.

The great schism of the sixteenth century had not as yet altered radically the face of Christendom. The canon law was therefore the universal marriage law. According to its decrees, and to them alone, a marriage was lawful or unlawful, valid or invalid. This code was now Jeanne's salvation.

According to the canon law, a marriage procured by force is no marriage. While, therefore, Jeanne's tears and protests continued, while her will was resolutely opposed to the union, it was impossible that the

¹ Sismondi, "Histoire des Français."

religious ceremony could be anything more than a form devoid of all moral sanction.

It is hardly conceivable that a girl of twelve could have been versed in those niceties of matrimonial law. Even had she understood something of the principles involved, something of the logic and justice of legislation (which was the only protection of the weak in an age of violence), the assistance of a trained hand was necessary if all that her unhappy situation demanded was to be done on her behalf. Somewhere in Plessis that trained hand was found whose skill would save the Princess.

A document bearing on every line the impress of the jurist's mind was prepared. It set forth in plain language the coercion of which the girl was the victim, and wound up with a solemn declaration that the Duke of Cleves could never be the husband of her heart and will. This quaint document read as follows :

"I, Jeanne of Navarre, persisting in the protestation I have already made, do hereby again affirm and protest that the marriage which it is desired to contract between the Duke of Cleves and myself is against my will, that I have never consented to it nor will consent, and that all I may say and do hereafter, by which it may be attempted to prove that I have given my consent, will be forcibly extorted against my wish and desire from my dread of the King, of the King my father, and of the Queen my mother, who has threatened to have me well whipped by the Baillive of Caen, my governess.

"By command of the Queen my mother, my said governess has also several times declared that if . . . I did not give my consent, I should be punished so severely as to occasion my death; and that by refusing I might be the cause of the total ruin and destruction of my father, my mother, and of their House.

"The which has inspired me with such fear and dread, even to be the cause of the ruin of my said father and mother, that I know not to whom to have recourse excepting to God, seeing my father and my mother abandon me, who both well know what I have said to them—that never can I love the Duke of Cleves, and that I will not have him.

"Therefore, I protest, beforehand, if it happens that I am affianced or married to the said Duke of Cleves in any way or manner, it will be against my heart and in defiance of my will; and that he shall never become my husband, nor will I ever hold and regard him as such, and that any marriage shall be reputed null and void. In testimony of which I appeal to God and to yourselves as witnesses of this my declaration that you are to sign with me, admonishing each of you to remember the compulsion, violence, and constraint employed against me upon the matter of this said marriage.¹

(Signed) "JEANNE DE NAVARRE.

"J. D'ARROS.

"FRANCES NAVARRE.

"ARNAULD DUQUESSE."

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

In his own despotic fashion Francis was doubtless fond of the child whose sufferings were thus coldly reduced to legal form. She was the only child of the sister who worshipped him. But, in this thing of such supreme moment to her, he was without mercy ; and the chivalry of France, the chivalry of her own Navarre, left the prisoner of Plessis to her fate.

By the orders of the King, she was formally betrothed to the absent Duke. But now, though her fate was apparently sealed, she did not falter in her determination to fight to the last her mighty uncle and her foolish mother. To her friends she made a verbal protest against the King's tyranny. And this again was reduced to parchment and laid aside in the bureau of one of her secret allies, to be brought forth to the light of day when the time should come to continue with better prospect of success the battle for her freedom. This second declaration was as follows :

“ I, Jeanne of Navarre, in the presence of you who out of love of truth signed the protestation which I before presented, and who perceive and acknowledge that I am compelled and obliged by the Queen-Mother, and by my governess, to submit to the marriage demanded by the Duke of Cleves between himself and me ; and that it is intended against my will to proceed to the solemnities of a marriage between us ; I take you all to witness that I persevere in the protest I made before you on the day of the pretended betrothal between myself and the said

Duke of Cleves, and in all and every protestation that I may at any time have made by word of mouth or under my own hand.

“Moreover, I declare that the said solemnity takes place against my will; and that all shall hereafter be regarded as null and void, as having been done and consented to by me under violence and restraint. In testimony of which I call you all to witness, requesting you to sign the present with myself, in the hope that by God’s help it will one day avail me.”

This document was signed by the same persons who had previously acted as witnesses. And then there was nothing more to be done but to betake herself to Châtellerault, where preparations for the wedding were proceeding on a sumptuous scale.

The 15th of July 1540 was appointed for the wedding. On that day in her chamber the little girl was arrayed in a robe of cloth-of-gold and laden with jewels, as became a Princess of France going to her nuptials. But when the ladies had arrayed her in all her splendour, Jeanne would not cross the threshold of her door. If they wanted her, they should come for her and take her by main force to the sacrifice. In the chapel a throng of peers and knights, the flower of the aristocracy of the kingdom, awaited her coming. Cardinals, prelates, and priests were in their stalls. Francis himself was there. But still one place was vacant. The Duke of Cleves, waiting before the altar for his bride, was still alone.

At last a whisper passed from one to another.

The little girl, they said, was ill. And ill indeed she doubtless was, and had been for many a day, ill with an aching heart and with the sickening thought that, poorer than the poorest maid in France, she had no friend in all the world to be her mainstay ; that no orphan was more helpless than she whose father and mother reigned, a King and Queen.

But, ill or well, the King should be obeyed. The King's eye ranged over the crowd of glittering nobles marshalled around. At last his glance rested on Anne de Montmorency, Constable and Grand Marshal of France, the stern, unscrupulous warrior who for more than half a century was foremost in the drama of French politics.

The King's favour had raised him high. Who so loyal, so brave, so resolute, so reckless in the King's service as the bold Montmorency ? And richly had he garnered the golden harvest of the qualities that make a courtier's fortune. But at last the time came when Francis grew jealous of the great man whose greatness was of his own making. Why it should be so, who can tell ? Francis was not a man of logic or even of plain sense. He was indeed as much a creature of emotion as any maid at his Court.

Some say that Montmorency dared to love the Queen, that he had been ardent to please her when his master would have it otherwise ; that he had given too generous a share of devotion to the Dauphin ; that he was too clever ! Gossip is never wanting in explanations for such a change of sentiment. Whatever the cause, the favourite's star was

eclipsed, and the hour had come when the shadow would become palpable to all.

Calling the Constable to him, the King ordered him to bring Jeanne thither. That a great nobleman should be commanded to use force to a little girl, just as though he were a nurse or governess, was a humiliation that could bear but one meaning.

"That is the end of my tenure of favour!" he muttered, and, turning on his heel, stalked down the aisle to do the King's bidding.

Great man though he was, he never dreamt of disobedience. By compliance he had risen high; by compliance he would preserve himself from the crash that threatened to overwhelm him.

Meanwhile King and courtiers awaited the issue of Montmorency's sorry enterprise. . . .

The minutes passed by, for some at least of those present, assuredly throbbed painfully by, as one might say; for not all of the Princes and peers of France can have been devoid of pity for the little girl upon whom a great King thus waged ruthless warfare.

But here she was at last. The tense moments of expectancy were at an end. The Constable was in the sanctuary, in the midst of all the resplendent array of nobles and clerics and officers of the Household, of curious maids and simpering dames. And in his arms a little bundle of cloth-of-gold and shimmering jewels—a bundle that was, alas! poor Jeanne of Navarre! Thus had she come to her wedding like a slave carried to the market-place. And a market-place it was in some sense for her, with Monsieur of Cleves as the successful bidder.

Montmorency cast down his burden amidst the covert sneers of his enemies. He had done his master's bidding, and the master had no further use for him. And the next commission that he fulfilled for his Majesty was to surrender all his dignities and take himself away from Court.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCESS'S DIVORCE

J EANNE being now a married lady, it was henceforth unnecessary to make of her nursery a prison. Her parents could now enjoy her society if they pleased, for it was no longer in their power to send her over the frontier into Spain, there to become the wife of Philip. That strange mockery of a holy ceremony at Châtellerault, when the little girl had been carried to the altar by Montmorency, had indeed been a political master-stroke. Jeanne was still a hostage in the sense that she was wedded to France. But she no longer needed keepers; so Francis could be generous, and permitted her to go home.

While the girl went south, the Duke her husband went north, having doubtless seen enough of his little lady's quality in the sanctuary on their wedding-day to satisfy for a long time the cravings of his heart.

As for Francis, in his inmost heart he probably cared nothing as to how this strange union ended. It was an age when the marital yoke sat but lightly on the consciences of men of rank. Francis was no exception to his generation. Rather otherwise, for the Duchess of Étampes was the real partner of his

throne. To such a man, utterly corrupt, utterly selfish, the forcing of his niece's inclinations was a small affair. Nothing mattered so that his pleasures were not thwarted. The supreme law of the State was that Francis should have his way. It was true that what he had done might very well play havoc with the girl's whole life; it was indeed impossible that such an experience, at so impressionable an age, could fail to warp her better nature, wanting as it already was in the gentler, the more lovable qualities. But of what account was the Princess's character or happiness at the Court of the magnificent Valois? The great thing was to embarrass, if possible to humiliate, the Emperor; and Charles with singular blindness delivered himself into his enemy's hands.

Though well knowing that the King of France was ever on the alert to attack him, nothing would do Charles but to depart for Algiers on an enterprise that very nearly accomplished his ruin.

Even in an age when war was attended with indescribable suffering, the fate of the Emperor's expedition excited universal surprise and pity. Of twenty-four thousand men whom he embarked, he led back to Spain only ten thousand, and even this small remnant of the force was composed of wretches half dead from privation and exposure.¹

It was at this moment, with the flower of his army buried beneath the waves of the Barbary coast and his treasury empty, that Francis chose to pick a quarrel with the Emperor. The latter's vassals

¹ Prescott and Robertson, "Life of Charles V."

provided such slender excuse as was needed. Ambassadors had been dispatched from Paris to Venice and Constantinople, the former to alienate the Republic from the Empire, the latter to negotiate an alliance with the Sultan. The ambassadors never reached their posts, being murdered on the way by friends of the Emperor.

Death did not terminate the services of the envoys to their Royal master. Francis wanted but an excuse to resume the war. These two dead men were perfect excuses, and forthwith he threw down the gage of battle.

Unhappily, however, for Francis, the advisers who had taken the place of Montmorency were incapable of organising a plan for striking at Charles heavily and swiftly before he should have had time to recover from the Algerian disaster.

The French plan was to engage the Emperor on every frontier ; to give his Majesty so much employment that his forces should necessarily remain widely scattered and proportionately weak at every point. To carry out this plan of campaign the French found it necessary to equip no less than five expeditions. The merit of the plan was that it divided the Emperor's forces. But here were the forces of France divided in the very same fashion and sent off as independent armies to all points of the compass ; so that this excellent scheme had the fatal drawback that it inflicted the same limitations on the striking power of either army.

One powerful French force drawing upon unlimited reserves might have accomplished prodigies, might

even have reached Vienna, the dream of the French King's life. But five armies could hope to do nothing more glorious than harass the wretched frontier towns, the cockpits wherein year after year King and Emperor contended for imaginary laurels.

Now or never should Cleves make good his claim to Gueldres. The alternatives to drawing the sword were the inglorious surrender, without striking a blow, of all his lofty pretensions or of precipitate flight into France. But Duke William preferred his own domains, even with ruin staring him in the face, to the hospitality of a foreign Court. Events showed that he had not misjudged the situation, for in the sequel his people paid to the full the bitter penalty of rebellion, while their ruler, when all was lost, was graciously permitted to change his coat and return to his true allegiance as a Prince of the Empire.

When it was too late Francis realised that he had failed his too confiding ally. Cleves sent him a desperate appeal for help, and Francis hurried forward an army with all possible dispatch to support him in the impending crisis. But the precious hours that had been wasted could never be recalled. And long before the desired aid reached the scene of the conflict, rivers of blood had expiated the rebel Duke's treason, and he had ceased to be the ally of France.

Cleves made his last stand at Duren, where the Emperor appeared on the 22nd of August 1543, with a force of forty thousand men. The French had persuaded the people and garrison that Charles had

perished in his ill-fated expedition to Algiers. When therefore the Emperor's heralds appeared before the walls and called upon the place to surrender, they treated the demand as a jest. It was the summons of a dead Emperor! Duren would not capitulate to a ghost!

When the heralds returned to the Imperial camp, forty pieces of artillery thundered the reply of Charles to the mockery of the citizens. The burghers ceased to laugh and jest. If Charles lay at the bottom of the Mediterranean, his guns could still rain havoc on the homes of men. Within a few days there was a practicable breach. The citizens fought gallantly; but the place was taken by storm and the inhabitants put to the sword.

This dreadful example struck such terror into the hearts of the people that the other towns laid down their arms, and sent their keys to the Emperor; while Cleves, in sore straits, was glad to throw himself on the mercy of his liege-lord.

To the Imperial camp at Venloo the young Duke repaired to make his submission. The splendid dreams he had fondly cherished were over, vanished at the first shock of battle. At the camp he was treated with scorn. And when at length he was received in audience, he may well have feared that the days of his sovereignty were numbered. But if an accommodating spirit could retrieve his misfortunes, Duke William was not utterly lost.

"Most august Emperor," he exclaimed, falling on his knees, "I come to throw myself at your feet, to accept whatever chastisement it may please you to

inflict for my past sins; or to receive from your clemency a hope, however faint it may be, of pardon and grace.”¹

The Emperor was arrayed in all the panoply of State—the crown on his head, the imperial sceptre in his hand. He would awe this presumptuous young man. But he would not alienate him, still less destroy him, because, wide as was his empire, he had learned the wisdom of making his enemies his friends when that were possible.

“If your transgressions,” replied the Emperor, “were not as heinous as they are, my natural clemency of disposition would not permit me to witness your humiliation without feelings of compassion. You may yourself judge how deeply your late felonious acts have incensed me, when I have sworn in the presence of my officers never to pardon you—not from a feeling of revenge, but to vindicate and maintain the honour and the majesty of the Empire which you have violated, and to afford a salutary warning to others never to imitate your example. Nevertheless, I am willing to fail in the strict observance of my oath, rather than to withhold from you my clemency; although I should violate no principle of justice did I avenge myself by inflicting upon you personal chastisement. Judge therefore of my goodness displayed in your favour, when I, a strict observer of my plighted word, consent to forgo my solemn vow in order to pardon your crime.”

The Emperor's manner suddenly changed. Though

¹ “Life of Charles V.”

there was a promise of clemency in his speech, Cleves may well have been surprised at what followed, for, stretching forth his hand, Charles smilingly raised up the suppliant and received him back into his favour.

All the Duke's hereditary dominions were restored to him, but he was obliged to withdraw his pretensions to Gueldres. His alliance with France was to cease, and his troops were to serve with the Imperialists in the war.

Meanwhile the King of France had ordered Jeanne to quit Pau and come to his camp in Luxembourg, there to join in the march which was to save Cleves and reunite her to her bridegroom.¹

At Soissons, however, a courier rode up to the King of Navarre with news that cheered the little girl's heart. It was to say that her husband in the hour of trial had failed France; that at the first shock of defeat he had had his fill of fighting, his fill of misfortune; that the heiress of Navarre need not hurry northwards; that having married to please her uncle, it was her uncle's pleasure to have her a maid again.

The Royal travellers therefore proceeded to Fontainebleau. The Duke of Cleves seems to have thought, or at any rate pretended to believe, that his right-about-face in the war should be no bar to receiving his bride. He demanded that she should be conducted to Aix-la-Chapelle. But not thus were things done in the sixteenth century. The bridegroom was ignored while Francis communicated with

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français,"

his sister. Little Jeanne had declared to her mother that she would die of grief if sent to one whom she never desired as a husband. When it seemed good to them they had despised her grief. . . . Let her die! What of it in the service of the King! But now in that same service it pleased them to humour her. To her brother Margaret wrote :

“ MONSEIGNEUR,—

“ Amid so many urgent affairs, I perceive you have not forgotten us ; nor have you omitted to write to me word what reply it has pleased you to make to the communication you have recently received from M. de Cleves, as well as to give permission to the King of Navarre and myself to avow before God and according to our conscience all that we know concerning this marriage.

“ But if this said Duke of Cleves had borne you the fidelity which he owed you and that I expected from him, never would we have revealed this matter ; for we would rather have seen our daughter die, as she protested she would do, than prevent her repairing to the spot where we believe she could render you service. But as this said Duke has proved so unfortunate, . . . or rather, as the King of Navarre and all our loyal servants declare, so infamous and vile, we have no longer to withhold the truth of this matter in order to break the bond which unites our daughter as little in reality to this said Duke of Cleves as it binds me to the Emperor. . . . I now very humbly entreat you to give us your aid in restoring her to the same liberty in the presence of the Church

and of men as I know that she possesses in the sight of God. I would rather see my daughter in her grave than know her to be in the power of a man who has deceived you, and inflicted so foul a blot on his own honour, for we exist only to serve you, Monseigneur, upon whom our own depend ; to preserve which I pray that the Almighty may keep you, and restore you to us in health, peace, and contentment, and that He will mercifully cause me ere long to hear the joyous words, ' The King has won a great victory,' or ' The King has achieved a happy peace ' !"

The marriage was, of course, never more than a form, but it was necessary to prove that it was so before it could be annulled. As the long process went on in the ecclesiastical courts, a dramatic scene was witnessed at High Mass at Plessis-les-Tours on Easter Day 1545.

In the chapel, crowded with the great, the young Princess, now fast growing into womanhood, took her stand before the congregation to make solemn oath that her marriage had in truth been no marriage.

" My Lords," said the girl, " I have already protested against and caused declarations to be put on record concerning the marriage which it was once wished to contract between the Duke of Cleves and myself. I furthermore declare in the presence of you all, my Lords, the Cardinal-Archbishop, and bishops here assembled, that it is my will and desire to persevere in those my said declarations and protestations, and that I persist in them, and will not retract. My Lords, in order the better to inform you

of my will and intent, I have drawn up a memorial and signed it with my own hand. This memorial and protest I am able now to read to you; and, my Lords, by that Holy Sacrament I am about to receive, I swear and affirm that what is here written contains nothing but the truth, in all which things I steadily persist.”¹

The girl then read the document, and swore to its truth on the missal. This quaint declaration was as follows :

“ Monseigneur le Cardinal, and you, my Lords the bishops and prelates here assembled, in your presence, and in that of the notaries here in this place, I declare that I have before written and signed with my own hand two protests—one of these protests was signed on the day upon which certain solemnities of betrothment passed between Monseigneur the Duke of Cleves and myself, the other on the day preceding this said pretended betrothal—both of which protestations I will presently produce, and cause to be read before you. I swear, and make affirmation on God's Holy Gospels, that I made, wrote, and signed them on these said days ; and, moreover, caused them to be witnessed for greater surety by those whose signatures appear with my own. I swear and make affirmation that they contain the truth, and that such was then my will and intention, in the which I have since persisted until the time that I made the declaration now before you in the month of October last, in the town of Alençon—which declaration I

¹ Freer, “ Life of Jeanne d'Albret.”

likewise swear and affirm contains the truth ; also, that I still persist in the same will, and intend to maintain it now, and for the future—to wit, that I never had the will, nor am I so inclined at the present moment, to bind myself under the law of marriage to the said Duke of Cleves ; but that, on the contrary, all that has passed in the matter of these said pretended betrothal and solemnities was done according to the statement contained in my said protestations. I therefore demand judicial testimony of this my declaration, made before you, my Lords, the Cardinal, and bishops here assembled, from the notaries present for that purpose.¹

(*Signed*) “JEANNE DE NAVARRE.”

The document was then handed to the Cardinal de Tournon, who forwarded it to Rome, together with the evidence of her mother and other ladies who were familiar with the circumstances which made the girl's union with Cleves a marriage only in name.

It was necessary for the Holy See to proceed with the utmost caution in such matters if its Courts were not to be used as the mere instruments of unscrupulous and designing politicians for whom matrimony possessed neither more nor less sanctity than suited their schemes of the hour. The justice of Jeanne's appeal for freedom was, however, easily proved, and a few months later Pope Paul III. gave effect to the decision of the Courts by pronouncing the marriage null and void, and declaring the parties free to marry again.

¹ Freer, “Life of Jeanne d'Albret.”

CHAPTER IV

JEANNE'S BRIEF DREAM OF LOVE

WHEN Jeanne's twentieth birthday arrived she was still unwedded. Yet she was a young lady of many attractions. Heiress to a crown, she had been taught Greek, Latin, Spanish ; had read the classical masterpieces with famous tutors ; was mistress of a clear and forcible style of prose ; could write poetry after a fashion ; and, when the hour came for amusement, could dance as blithely as any lady at the Louvre.¹

The wonder is that such a prize should have so long evaded the pursuit of the ambitious and unscrupulous nobles who thronged the Court of the Valois. Perhaps her adventure with Cleves had in some way dimmed her lustre. Perhaps she needed long years to forget the nightmare of her childhood before she could think of matrimony again. Richly dowered with health and wit and high spirits, the Princess, at this period, entered with zest into the joy of life. It was well, perhaps, that it should be so ; well that in the years to come there should be some buoyant memories to which she could turn for a moment in search of relief from the burden

¹ Brantôme, "Book of the Ladies."

of the long, sunless days of her loveless marriage and hopeless widowhood.

In Jeanne's life there was but one love-story. And now the hour had come when the first pages of that troubled tale were to be written.

Its hero was Antoine de Bourbon, a Prince of the Royal House of France, in whose veins flowed by direct descent the blood of St. Louis.

Antoine, to the eyes of the young and imaginative girl, had all the qualities of a knight of romance. At this time he was thirty years old, in appearance handsome, in manners easy and debonair. In battle he had over and over again covered himself with glory. At the Court nobody was more ready of tongue. Not that Antoine ever said anything worth remembering; but he was a master of good-natured badinage, of courtly repartee, of that sparkling chatter that is often a good substitute for wit, and often dazzles more effectually than the virgin gold itself.

With Francis I. Antoine had been a great favourite, and by him had been created a Duke of France for valour in the field. On the death of his father, in 1537, he succeeded to the dukedom of Vendôme and to the governorship of Picardy. Other honours were showered upon him. But as Antoine advanced in years he gave no sign that he would rise to the height of his opportunities. While he was in the field all went well—there he was never disappointing. But the moment the campaign was over, he was bent only on pleasure, with never a thought of mastering the art of government, if art it could be called at

a time when the acquisition and retention of power were everything, the people nothing.

As Antoine's rival for the hand of the Princess there entered the field one of the most distinguished, one of the most interesting figures of his time—one as brave as Antoine in the field, but, unlike him, a man of affairs, of ideals, of soaring ambition even when the camp had been left behind. This was Francis of Lorraine, afterwards Duke of Guise.

In this contest for a lady's hand the influence of the Crown was not inactive. Francis I. had died on the 31st of March 1547, leaving his throne to Henry II., whose Queen was of course Catharine de' Medici. But the Florentine Princess was only queen in name. The real partner of Henry's throne was Diana of Poitiers.

Diana was seventeen years older than the unfortunate King who was her slave. She was, indeed, older than the Duchess of Étampes, the lady who had filled a similar place in the late King's Court.

Henry and Catharine had been fourteen years married when Francis died. During all these years Catharine had been content to be a mere ornament of her father-in-law's Court. Endowed with singular grace of manner, with tact and wit and vivacity, she nevertheless only succeeded in holding a modest place in the Royal circle in virtue of her father-in-law's condescension. As for her husband, she was content to accept from him such favours as Diana graciously ordained for her. It was a bitter apprenticeship. But Catharine was almost grateful that it was no worse, grateful that they did not trump up some

excuse for attempting to divorce her and for sending her back to her native land.

Nor were her trials at an end when nominally she became the First Lady in France. Still Diana remained to be a thorn in her side, and so would remain until Henry should have drawn his last breath.

In the new Government the Guises were the dominant party. One of the family had married a daughter of Diana. That in itself was a sufficient reason why the King should favour their pretensions. It was also a sufficient reason why his Majesty should support the suit of the most brilliant of their House for the hand of his cousin, the young heiress of Navarre.

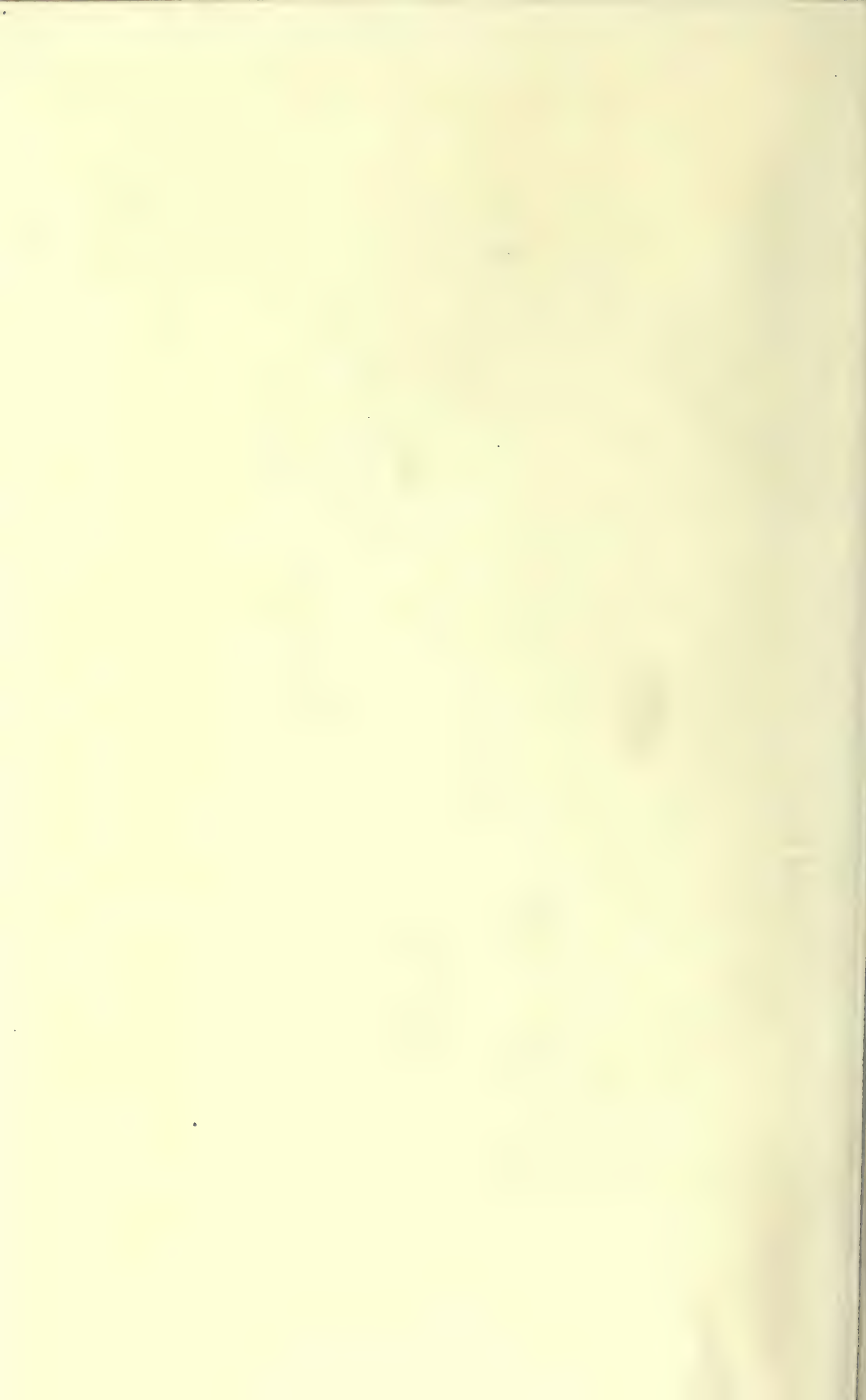
What Diana said was law to the monarch ; but not to Jeanne. His late Majesty had forced her into a marriage with Cleves. One venture of that kind sufficed. They could no longer carry her by main force to the altar as Montmorency had done nine years before—or, at all events, they dared not, for the young lady who had so methodically laid her plans for a divorce when but a child would scarcely be unequal to a second emergency of the kind now that she was a full-grown woman.

On this occasion Jeanne found in her mother an ally in her opposition to the Court. Not willingly would she see her daughter united to a family of which Diana was a member by marriage. All her life she had been her brother's slave ; but that baneful influence had not descended to her nephew with his crown. If Jeanne was to be a second time the



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Clouet

DIANA OF POICTIERS



victim of a loveless marriage, her mother, at least, would have no part in the crime.

During all this time the King of Navarre never ceased to intrigue with Spain, always in the hope of regaining the province that held his heart. Henry d'Albret still cherished the hope that his dreams would be realised through the marriage of Jeanne with Philip. The Emperor seemed to regard the project with favour. He had no other right, save such as the sword conferred, to any portion of Navarre. This marriage therefore possessed for a man who was not without a conscience the attraction that it would enable him to make restitution without losing a rood of his vast dominions.

Providence had not, however, decreed that Charles should thus comfortably dispossess himself of the territory annexed by Ferdinand in 1512. Jeanne was destined to find a husband in one who was the almost perfect antithesis of Philip. The latter was plodding, sincere, imbued with a high sense of responsibility and perhaps no sense of humour. Philip was capable of anything in the name of Duty. And to Antoine of Bourbon, Duty was a word that possessed no magic. And Antoine was Jeanne's first and only love. In the sixteenth century love was not necessary to marriage. We have seen Jeanne carried to the altar. But by some strange trick of fate, she was now permitted to take as her companion one who had aroused all the warmth of her nature. And no marriage of convenience could have proved more disastrous.

In October 1548 the pair were married. The

occasion was celebrated as a great Court festival.¹ The rejoicings were in some sense rejoicings over the discomfiture of the Guises. They marked too, in some sense, the opening of a vendetta whose long history was traced in tears, in blood.

What the history of France would have been had Francis of Guise won our Princess is now a vain but alluring speculation. Jeanne, however, not only chose the easy-going Bourbon, but throughout her whole life laid at the door of Guise responsibility for some of Antoine's sins. His vanity, his infidelities, his shallowness, his infantile credulity in politics were all so many reasons for hating the Guises. This hatred warped her whole outlook on life. It filled her with incessant apprehensions which in the end so disturbed her judgment, so embittered her heart, that the old joyous Jeanne, who led the dance and loved a frolic, became utterly transformed into a brooding fanatic, old before her time, condemned by her temperament to an early and tragic end.

Meanwhile the Duke of Guise was also consoled with a bride, one perhaps, whom he found more charming if a less brilliant match than the heiress to the crown of Navarre. This was Anne d'Este, daughter of the Duke of Ferrara, who had been brought from Italy to fill the place that Jeanne despised.

Scarcely had quietude succeeded to Jeanne's wedding festivities than the first almost impalpable shadows of coming misfortune fell upon the Royal House of Navarre. The young bride's mother had

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

carried a heavy heart during all the gay doings of recent days. The volatile romancer was at length emerging from her world in the clouds to dull earth. And soon the grave would be her cold abode.

Margaret, with the King of Navarre and accompanied by their daughter and son-in-law, set out for their own dominions. The people along the route gathered in great crowds to salute the Royal cavalcade. To Margaret, at all events, it was a last farewell.

It was at Odos in Bigorre that the Queen of Navarre lay down to die. All her life she had favoured the poets and thinkers and theologians who were supposed to be supporters of the new opinions. But in this supreme hour she forsook the pose of patroness of novelty, of judge betwixt the new and the old, and professing the faith of St. Louis, she closed her eyes for ever.

After her mother's death Jeanne's position became at once more important and more anxious. She was, as matters stood, heiress to the throne. But her father might marry again, and, at a time when marriage was one of the trump cards of diplomacy, every intriguer might be expected to number a prospective Queen of Navarre amongst his resources.

In this respect, what might have been expected, and what doubtless was expected by Jeanne, presently occurred. A marriage between her father and a Princess of Spain was soon spoken of. But probably from a disinclination on the royal widower's part to enter into a contract so serious, the Princess of Spain remained a Princess of Spain.

Meanwhile news reached Bearn that relieved, to some extent, the anxieties of the people, who at this time seem to have regarded the project of a Spanish marriage with extreme dislike. Jeanne, they learned, was about to become a mother.

It was at the Castle of Courcy, in Picardy, that Jeanne awaited the birth of the infant who, it now seemed, meant so much to her destiny. Letters written by her at this period reveal rather a sad picture of the young wife waiting in loneliness for the coming of her child, her heart hungry for news of the outer world, above all for news of Antoine. They also show that Jeanne was on good terms with the Duchess of Guise, however much she disliked and distrusted her great husband.

"Ma Cousine," she wrote to the young Duchess, "not having been able to bid you adieu in person when I quitted the Court, I have resolved to do so in writing, to beg you always to hold me in your affectionate remembrance, as I return the same to you. I assure you that you have no relative better affected towards you than myself; and if you do not believe this, you do me great injury.

"To prevent you from becoming forgetful of the friendship which I bear you, and also that your esteem may not decrease for me, I will often remind you of it by letter; so you will perceive how desirous I am that our regard should continue throughout our lives.

"Ma Cousine, if you should happen to have news from the camp, I pray you send me word of it by

my messenger, and especially concerning the health of my husband; also, of the time when they think of leaving the camp, and whether you are likely to be besieged where you are, that I may lead succours to your rescue! I beg you to present my very humble commendations to the Queen, when you see her Majesty. I have not dared at present to importune her with my letters.

"In conclusion, if you have tidings from the camp, I pray you send the news to me. . . ." ¹

On the 21st of September 1550 a boy was born to Jeanne. And the infant-hope of the mountaineers was dubbed Duke of Beaumont.

For only a brief space was the child left to his nation. For twenty-three months he struggled for life; then, at length, a regime that never gave him a chance robbed the mother of her first-born, and Beaumont died, killed with kindness, as it was understood by nurses who dreaded fresh air and sunshine as visitants of wrath.

Beaumont's death was a bitter disappointment to his maternal grandfather, and once again they began to talk of his marrying. Then, in August 1552, at the Castle of Gaillon, a second son, named the Count of Marle, came to relieve the anxieties of Jeanne.

Beaumont's life had not been thrown away in vain. Marle, at all events, was not destined to be coddled to death. He grew to be a lusty babe, and, very proud of him, Antoine and Jeanne set out for Mont de Marsan to meet the King of Navarre.

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

Henry was delighted with the boy, and the happy parents and the no less happy grandsire, light of heart, went a-hunting.

One of the Princess's ladies was left in charge of the child, and she too would have her diversion ; so, taking the child in her arms, she went to an open window and opened a lively dialogue with a gentleman without. And while they gossiped the spirit of mischief impelled the girl to throw the child into the arms of the cavalier, and he back to her again. It was a merry game, quite to the fancy doubtless of a Court damsel and her knight. But it was death to the Princess's child, in whose frail bosom beat not only his own tiny heart but the hearts of all his kindred. As to and fro he was hurled, eye and hand failed for once the merrymakers, and falling to the ground with a thud that must have turned to ice the blood in the veins of his traitor guardians, the child received mortal injuries.

Antoine and Jeanne and old Henry returned from the hunting-field to hear piercing cries echoing through the castle halls. Jeanne, at least, would never forget that home-coming. In a little while her darling found relief from his agony in death, and the castle was silent once more.

The father bore with equanimity these successive misfortunes. In no form could dull care attach itself to Antoine's buoyant nature. Life was given him that he might enjoy it, and a child more or less in this world where children were ever coming and going was hardly matter for serious thought to this laughter-loving Prince.

Although her bridal days had not long passed, Jeanne must have already been in some degree disillusioned. The mother, at all events, was not insensible to her double loss. The grief was hers alone. She had married one who, when the path of duty was rugged, when thorns bestrewed the way, would turn aside and thread the flower-decked places whence honest Sadness must ever fly, a shame-faced stranger.

To add to Jeanne's grief, her father's disappointment turned to rage. He declared that she was unworthy to be a mother. The meeting, therefore, which was to have been an occasion of so much happiness, had proved to be a new source of grief, of bitterness, and of disappointment.

The Duke and Duchess of Vendôme, instead of proceeding to Pau, as had been intended, parted with the King of Navarre and returned into Picardy.

In February 1553 Jeanne took up her residence at La Flèche, in Angevin. There she found herself once more alone. Again the camp called Antoine, and in loneliness she was obliged to dwell with the ashes that already possessed her heart. Bereft of her children, forsaken by her father, separated from her husband, her only comfort was tidings of her gallant lord, who, busy with his sword, seems to have given scant heed to the woman who adored him. From here she wrote again to the Duchess of Guise a pathetic prayer for news of her husband :

"Ma Cousine," she wrote, "I entreat you to send me the news from the camp by the messenger whom

I despatch to you. . . . You will do me an infinite good if you will send me the tidings of what has recently happened there by my messenger, who is to be trusted; also, what you may have heard relative to the return of our husbands. . . . If there should be news which you fear may get abroad, assure yourself that I shall as scrupulously guard the secret as any friend that you have.

"As I know that you are rather idle at writing with your own hand, I shall be content if the letter is written by your secretary, provided that it be of ample length, and comprehensive, stating whether you know anything of the proceedings of my husband, to whom I have written the enclosed letter, which I beg you will forward to him.

"Do not deem me importunate if I address myself to you as to her from whom I have already received many tokens of friendship; so much so that you may always rely upon me as a personage more at your disposal than any relative or friend that you possess."¹

At La Flèche hope again came to cheer the young mother's aching heart. But the thoughtless Antoine nearly caused a tragedy darker and more irreparable for Navarre than the misfortunes which had carried off his firstborn children.

Her husband, playing with all the high spirits of a schoolboy, seized an arquebus one day and levelled it at Jeanne. Suddenly there was an explosion, and for an instant the jester was paralysed with fear.

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

Had he killed his wife! But, happily, the bullet had fallen to the floor before the powder had exploded; otherwise Antoine's joke might have left him a widower, and the problem of the succession to the throne of Navarre would have added fresh confusion to the politics of France and Spain.

Jeanne, however, not only escaped the bullet, but the adventure caused no injury to her health.

In due course a son was born to her at Pau, whither she had gone for the event. It was on this occasion that she sang the Gascon hymn to Our Lady, already described in these pages; and the old King, true to his conviction that the mother had not the wit to rear a babe, chose a peasant woman as his foster-mother, and in her home, like a child of the people, the little Prince of Bearn passed his infancy.

CHAPTER V

JEANNE CROWNED QUEEN OF NAVARRE

ON the 25th of May 1555 the King of Navarre died. The hero of Pavia, he who had been for long the mould of form to the cavaliers of his time, had passed away, leaving undone the work that had ever engaged his heart. Upper Navarre was still a Spanish province.

And now Jeanne's fears lest the oft-spoken-of marriage between her father and a Spanish princess should rob her of her inheritance were at an end. The Crown was hers; and, by courtesy, her husband was "King of Navarre."

But her anxieties had not vanished altogether. They were still there; only their source had changed their locality from Pau to Paris. With the advent of the young Queen, French statesmen began to evince a burning desire for the total extinction of her sovereignty. It was not well, they said, that there should be two Kings, two Queens, in France; for as portion of France they chose to regard the little kingdom in the south. And since one crown should vanish, it should be that of the weaker State. So they argued, little dreaming how Fate would confound them by one day raising the peasant-bred

Prince of Bearn to the supremacy they now designed for the House of Valois.

This cynical intrigue to deprive the young Queen of her crown would doubtless have died on the lips of its authors had King Antoine been a different stamp of man. As First Prince of the Blood Royal of France he needed but little strength of character and only an ordinary share of judgment and common sense to ensure for himself and for his wife due respect in the councils of his fatherland. But as Antoine advanced in years he advanced in folly. Beyond a nimble tongue and a ready sword, he had no gifts that could be turned to profitable account, or if such gifts had been portion of his dower, neglect had utterly extinguished them.

This worthless champion of Navarre was completely eclipsed in the councils of the French King by the brilliant man who had vainly opposed him in the lists of love. The Duke of Guise was now the greatest man in France. It was an age when real military genius was assured of high fortune. War was the only permanent feature of political life, and in war Guise had never failed. Besides his success in arms and his industry in peace, the Duke enjoyed the advantage of being one of a large family, the members of which were singularly loyal to one another, or at all events to a common policy.

Most famous of the brothers after Francis was the Archbishop of Rheims, familiar in the troubled history of his age as the Cardinal de Lorraine. Another brother, the Cardinal de Guise, also held an archbishopric. Of the remaining brothers, Claude,

Duke of Aumale, was perhaps the most distinguished ; while their sister, Mary, the widow of James V. of Scotland, was Queen-Regent of that Kingdom for her little daughter whose exquisite beauty was already the delight of the ladies of the French Court, as it would soon be the envy and despair of the gentlemen. This lovely young creature, it need hardly be said, was none other than the peerless Mary Queen of Scots, to her finger-tips, for all her island blood and breeding, a fair maid of France.

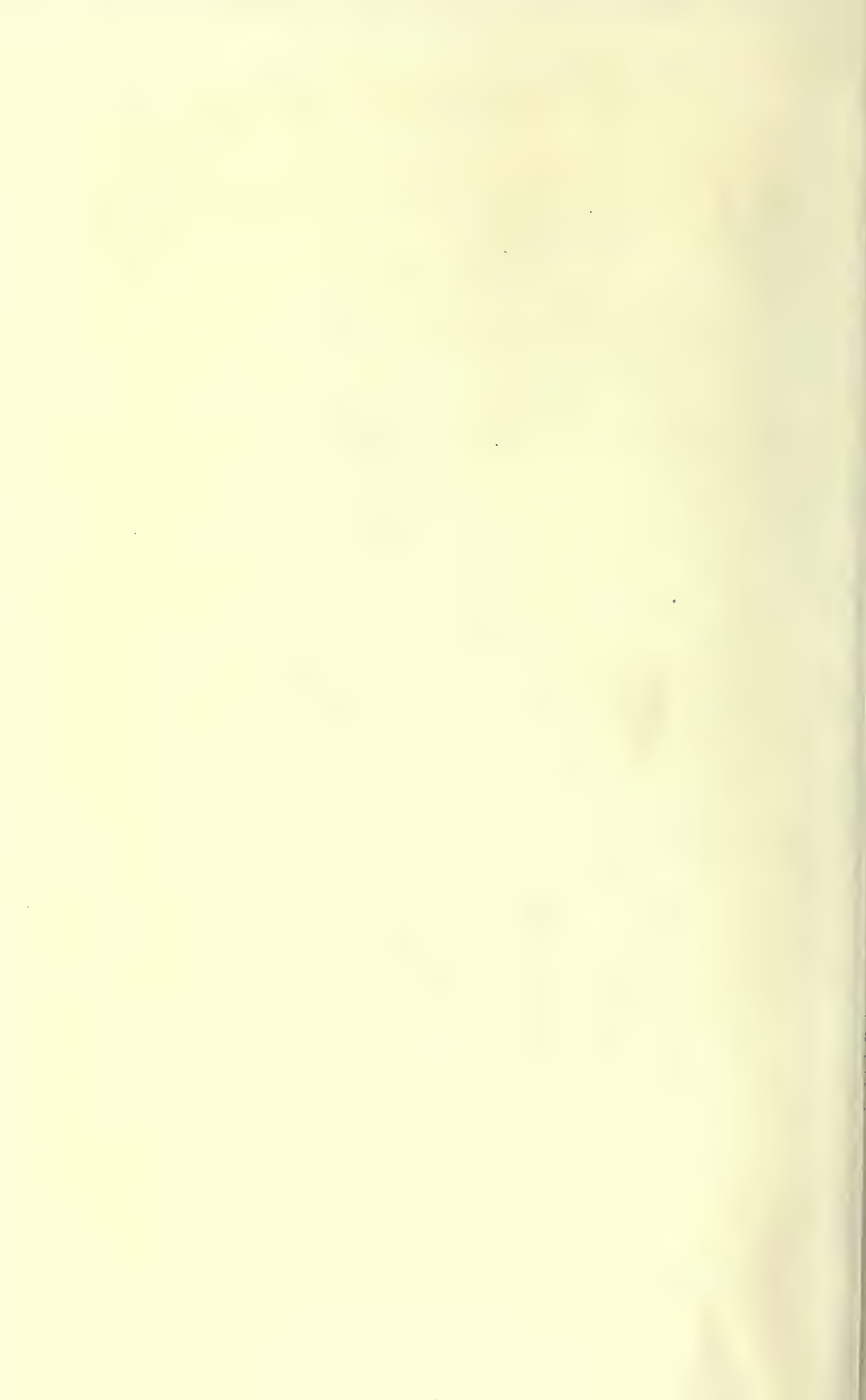
To make her a Frenchwoman and keep her one was the policy of the Guises—a policy fraught with disaster for the hapless girl. But to the vaulting ambition of her kinsfolk, all seemed well. In Paris the Guises were regarded as the virtual rulers of Scotland. This was not only flattering to their pride but conferred upon them solid advantages. But something more splendid for them, something still more ruinous for the girl, was in the background. The Dauphin wanted a wife. . . . Their little Mary was matchless, adorable. They would make her Dauphiness, and to-morrow she would be Queen of France !

This powerful faction encountered in the Cabinet of the French monarch only one rival, and powerful though he was, he was in reality no rival at all. In an age when rank and, still more, birth counted for so much, Anne de Montmorency (who had been recalled to office at the death of the late King), great though his position was, was still incapable of offering serious challenge to the influence of the Guises. As for their policy, he had no quarrel with



After an engraving by Cock

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS AS QUEEN OF FRANCE



that. It was his own. But the Constable, who was now verging on sixty, would, if it were possible, play the lieutenant to no man. Proud, greedy of wealth and power, unscrupulous, cunning, brave as a lion when it was worth his while, he was nevertheless but a peer of France, while the Guises were of the Blood Royal with pretensions to a crown.

Famous in the annals of the period, and closely associated with Montmorency, were the sons of Gaspard de Coligny and Louise de Montmorency. They were Odet, born in 1517, Bishop of Beauvais and a Cardinal; Gaspard, born in 1519, famous as "the Admiral"; and Francis, born in 1521, known as Seigneur d'Andelot. But to Montmorency these brilliant kinsmen of his were followers rather than comrades. His temperament, indeed, made comradeship impossible. His manners were harsh. One dared at times scarcely speak to him. To contradict him was intolerable.¹ Sitting in council with men far above him in the scale of precedence, Montmorency never concerned himself with considerations of etiquette. The crusty old warrior *prit la parole* and let princes and cardinals go to the devil. His disgrace during the closing years of the reign of Francis had not mellowed his temper. Advancing years found him Montmorency still.

Once the Constable made a daring bid to readjust the balance of power at Court in his own favour. He is said to have opposed to the influence of Diana of Poitiers that of the Countess Fleming, governess of the young Queen of Scots. For a fleeting moment

¹ Bayle.

the Countess eclipsed her middle-aged rival. But presently the King repented of his fickleness. The old love, the old habit of submission to a stronger mind, reasserted itself. Diana was once more triumphant, and never again was her dominion to be seriously challenged. The King did not, however, escape without punishment. The now forgotten Fleming bore him a son. But Diana is recorded to have said that "none of Henry's children were like their father!"

Such were the predominant influences at Court when Jeanne and Antoine presented themselves there after their accession.

The French King, in the first instance, proposed to Antoine that Bearn should be surrendered in exchange for territory in the heart of France. The King of Navarre received the proposal with favour. It was necessary, however, that Jeanne should be consulted, necessary furthermore that she should consent, for she was the real mistress of Bearn, to which he was but a stranger.

When the proposal was communicated to Jeanne, her indignation may well have astonished her husband. It was bad enough that the King of France should thus seek to degrade her House, to reduce her son to the status of a mere princeling among princelings; but that her husband, the boy's father, should embrace the offer as an honour was the death-blow to such esteem as she still felt for him. Love him she always would, despite his baseness. But his handsome face, his winning manners, his lively wit, could no longer blind her to the truth that she had married a *petit*

maître, very charming to look upon, to listen to, but devoid of heart and soul.

When she heard this man, whom she had made a King, invite her to barter away her inheritance, a fear that must often have haunted her during her brief married life must now have been converted to dread certainty. Most assuredly her marriage had been a mistake. With her eyes open, of her own free will and choice, she had taken the wrong man. In childhood she had been sold by others. In womanhood she had sold herself, and in exchange had not even bargained for a man of common honour, of common principle. Her sunny, graceful Prince, so ready with a jest, meaner than any serf in Navarre, would sell the land that had placed him on its throne.

Deserted even by her husband, Jeanne nevertheless resolved to hold her own. Let Antoine choose, if he would, to be a simple Frenchman. He was fit for nothing better. She was cast in a different mould. She was born to be a Queen. A Queen she would live; and, if they drove her to it, a Queen she would die.

Her enemies had tried to mine the ground beneath her feet; they had seduced her husband from his true allegiance. She met them with their own weapons. She told the King of France that it was not for her to sell her dominions upon his Majesty's terms. Bearn was, she said, an independent State. It was for its Parliament to consider the proposals of the French Court and accept or reject them.

Jeanne acted with so much *finesse* that Henry either believed that she favoured his scheme, or thought it

expedient to pretend that he did so. To assist her in promoting his designs, commissioners were appointed to accompany her to her home, there to conduct negotiations with the local barons, if necessary perhaps to purchase their fidelity with round sums.

Meanwhile Antoine was rewarded for his subservience by being made Governor of Guienne; while Louis de Condé, his brother, succeeded to the governorship of Picardy.

The King, however, was a little too precipitate in the distribution of his rewards. The transfer of Jeanne's dominions to the French Crown, far from progressing smoothly, did not progress at all. The commissioners found in Nicholas d'Angu, Bishop of Mende, Chancellor of Navarre, a faithless servant, who was ready to enter cordially into the designs of France. But the traitor could not act alone. He made overtures to Bernard d'Arros, one of the eleven Barons of Bearn, "jurats de la cour," as they were called, and he immediately took measures to thwart the perfidious Chancellor.

Assembling the nobles, Arros surprised them with the news that a conspiracy was on foot to deprive them of their ancient Constitution. With burning words he dilated on the treachery of the design thus secretly hatched against their young Queen's rights and against the liberties of her people. Nor did he conceal from them that, high in the councils of Navarre, France had found a traitor-ally! The Chancellor, Nicholas of Mende, the trustee of their honour and independence, had betrayed them.

The nobles dispersed to their homes, and scattered

far and wide amongst gentle and simple tidings of what was afoot. The rage of the people was unbounded. The dishonoured Chancellor was obliged to fly the country. The fortifications were put into order for immediate defence, and all preparations made to oppose by force of arms the ambitions of France.

During all these commotions Jeanne had been a model of discretion. All that Arros had done had been with her approval. But she now dispatched a message to the King of France which laid on the shoulders of her subjects complete responsibility for the failure of his plans. Nothing, she said, could overcome their repugnance to the proposed changes. Which was quite true. Only she might have added, if transparent candour were good policy, that her own repugnance to descending from her throne and yielding up her little empire was no less invincible.

France had just concluded peace with Spain, and to declare war upon Navarre with the idea of annexing the country would have led to a certain renewal of hostilities. But Henry, for the moment, had had enough of war. He had to rest content, therefore, with punishing his friend Antoine, since Jeanne was beyond his reach. The King showed his displeasure by detaching Languedoc from the government of Guienne. Furthermore, Antoine's brother, Louis de Condé, was deprived of the governorship of Picardy, which was given to Coligny, while favours were showered on the Guises.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRAGEDY OF A FAMOUS TOURNEY

SO far Jeanne had managed to hold her own without inviting an open quarrel with France. For a woman of her temperament it was a remarkable diplomatic victory not only over her enemies but over herself.

While still absorbed in her efforts to ward off the danger which menaced her from Paris, a new one appeared on her very hearth. Antoine was the author of her new perplexities, having adopted the course which, of all others, was best calculated to effect her ruin.

Disgusted with the humiliations which he had suffered at the hands of the French Court, the King of Navarre began to take the revenge of the disappointed man. Thus far enthusiasm for religion had not been one of his characteristics. Now, however, he took the Calvinists under his patronage, with the certain result of firing not only the enmity of France but also of Spain.

The late Queen Margaret had passed for a patron of the new opinions. And encouraged by her sympathy, Calvinist ministers had fled from persecution to find a refuge in her dominions. One of these,

a minister named David, now became the object of Antoine's special interest. His action in this respect inflicted far deeper mortification upon his own Queen than upon her powerful neighbours, for she was obliged to issue orders that ministers should not preach publicly without the leave of the bishop of the diocese.

No other course than that of openly snubbing her husband was open to Jeanne. To have encouraged him in his patronage of the Calvinists would have involved her in new perplexities, in more formidable perils, at a time when the French Court was frankly desirous of extinguishing her rule.

Throughout the whole course of the sixteenth century one finds religion and politics inextricably interwoven. The loss of Languedoc had kindled Antoine's enthusiasm for Geneva. Fear of France, if no higher motive, made Jeanne still faithful to Rome. Nor were her fears without substance. In Paris severe edicts were promulgated against the Huguenots. These edicts fostered the evil passion of greed, which played so large a part in the wars of religion in many lands. It was decreed that the property of Huguenots should be forfeited; and the hunt for the unorthodox became a highly profitable one to Diana and other favourites.

But what prize so tempting as a crown! And here was Antoine, who was not only King of Navarre, but also the first subject of France, inviting judgment. Sufficient excuse for striking at him was soon forthcoming. Pope Paul IV. caused a protest to be entered at Paris against the conduct of David's patron.

Jeanne and her husband had only recently been crowned at Pau, and here was a storm brewing which might very well leave them without a crown or a rood of land. A Papal interdict had long ago served as Ferdinand's excuse for despoiling the Albrets of Upper Navarre. Jeanne had no mind to court such another disaster and lose the remnant of her dominions because of Antoine's vagaries.

She tried to reason her husband into a more prudent frame of mind. But, the creature of his every whim, Antoine was not amenable to reason. Then she flung at him something of an ultimatum, a reminder that she, not he, was the Sovereign of Navarre.

"If it be your pleasure," she said to him, "to lose your own domains, I have nothing to observe thereon. As for myself, I shall not hazard what is left of our territories."

Antoine, however, was as obstinate as he was foolish. Devoid of religious principle, incapable of sincerity in matters of faith, he deliberately chose to risk the destruction of his wife's proudest hopes rather than forgo the pleasure of coquetting with a religion which was to him merely a convenient political faction. To Antoine, nothing was really serious. To his wife, nothing that touched her feelings was ever trivial. And, by and by, when her husband had changed his faith half a dozen times, when "L'Échangeur" was a jest and a nickname that summed up in a word his career of conversion and perversion, Jeanne, driven to desperation by his treachery and folly, had changed once and changed

for ever. For her there was no going back. And having once raised the Huguenot banner, she lived and died beneath it.

At length a hint came from Paris that unless a different policy was pursued towards the Huguenots, an army under the Duke of Guise would enter Navarre to inculcate sound theology at the point of the sword. Jeanne saved the situation by instant action. Her kinsman the Cardinal d'Armagnac was recalled from Rome and created her Lieutenant. And she forthwith formed the courageous resolve of visiting the French Court, there to see King Henry, and make a frank bid for reconciliation and friendship with one who was her cousin as well as her suzerain.

She sought on the mountain-side a peacemaker, a little boy, brown-cheeked and barefooted, with locks unshorn flowing in the breeze. The boy was the little Prince of Bearn, who, unshod and clad only in a simple tunic like a son of the soil, was now his mother's only hope, the only star that lighted her lonely way along a path beset with perils.

The French Court was at Amiens. And thither Jeanne set out, in March 1557, accompanied by the frickle, wayward, sinning Antoine and the boy who was his living image.

At Court the travellers were coldly received. But the little Prince of Bearn brought with him a charm that soon thawed the ice and captured the King's heart.

The boy, who looked so strangely wild and beautiful, was asked by the King :

"Do you wish to be my son?"

"There is my father," replied the boy ingenuously, looking towards his father.

The King laughed heartily. Here at least was no flatterer.

"Since," said the King, "you will not be my son, would you be my son-in-law?"

Here was an offer that made no inroads on the little Prince's loyalty to his parents.

"Yes," he replied with gusto that must have heartily amused the courtiers; and the first was heard of his betrothal to Marguerite of Valois.

So pleased was Henry II. with the little boy who was one day to be Henry IV. of France that he wished to keep him near him. Motives less cordial may also have inspired him. But whatever the King's motives, Jeanne could not be separated from her son. The mountains of Bearn should be his first school of manners and of manliness, his head bare, his feet naked to his native granite.

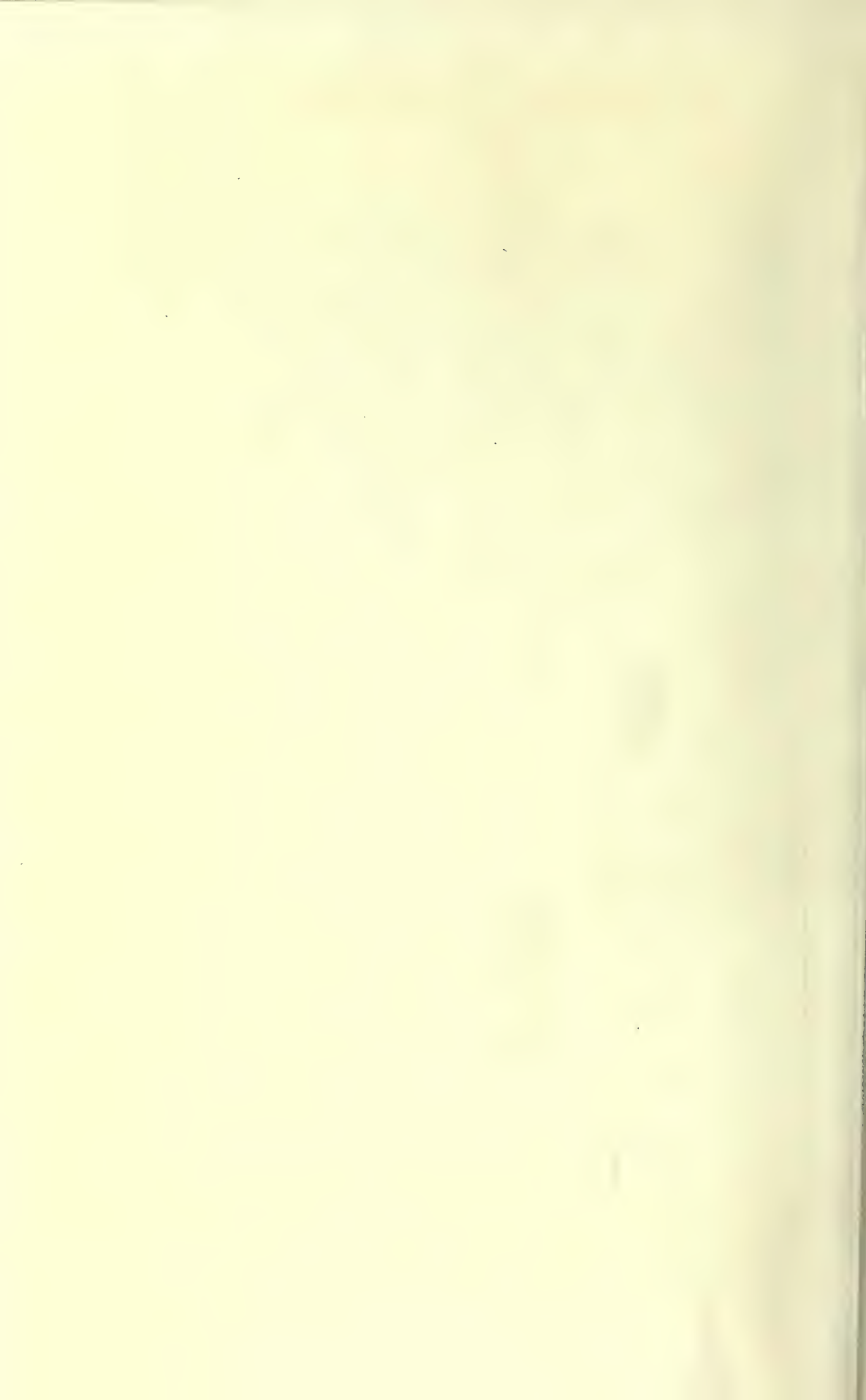
The war between France and Spain had again broken out. Charles V. had surrendered the Imperial sceptre to his brother and the crown of Spain to his son Philip II., and retired to a monastery, to find there the peace that was so far removed from the purple. Now it seemed that the son should fight all over again his father's battles.

The Cardinal de Tournon vigorously opposed the war. Montmorency was also opposed to it. But with the Constable, conviction and policy were often totally different things. The Guises had everything to gain by the war; but they also stood to lose most. Montmorency would let them go forth and destroy



From a photo by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a painting by Clouet

HENRY, PRINCE OF NAVARRE, AFTERWARDS HENRY IV.



themselves ; for, veteran warrior that he was, he knew full well that many who went to the battlefield to reap glory garnered instead a harvest of woe. Perhaps with even Diana against him, opposition on the old warrior's part would have been in vain. He had, however, a talent for tortuous methods, and such men often have to bear responsibility that is not fairly theirs. Perhaps it was so in this case, and that the Constable played a deep and subtle and deceptive part only in the opinion of his enemies. But at whatever door lay responsibility for the new deluge of blood, the resumption of war inspired Jeanne with fresh hope that a fairer day was dawning for her country.

The King of France was her friend ; his daughter was to be her daughter ; her son was to be his son. If France should vanquish Spain—and assuredly she would do so—then might she not, the Queen of Navarre, hope for the restoration of the lost province, that dream so dear to the Albrets for half a century ?

The bitter fruit of the new campaign was the battle of St. Quentin. France had received a deadly blow ; and her heart lay naked to her enemies. On that disastrous field Montmorency commanded for France ; and when the day was lost and won he remained a prisoner in the hands of the enemy.

Once more the gods were on the side of the Guises. The Duke was in Italy with twelve thousand men, prosecuting the war in that region. Now he was called to retrieve the calamity that had dimmed the Constable's renown and exposed France to absolute

ruin, had Philip not hesitated to follow up his overwhelming victory by an immediate advance.

The Guises, Jeanne's enemies, were now more powerful than ever. Even such check as the choleric old Constable had imposed upon them was withdrawn, and the public soon heard that they had achieved their pet project of betrothing the lovely Mary of Scotland to the young Dauphin. In their mind's eye, the authors of this marriage already doubtless saw Scotland a French province, and France an appanage of the House of Guise.

The 19th of April 1558 was the day fixed for the nuptials of Mary and Francis. Jeanne and Antoine bade farewell to their home in the south and journeyed to Paris for the occasion, leaving the governorship in the hands of the Cardinal d'Armagnac—to some extent a sign that Jeanne desired to maintain friendly relations with the Holy See.

In Paris, however, the King and Queen of Navarre found themselves confronted with a religious commotion which doubtless derived most of its warmth from hatred of the Guises, who had inflicted upon their enemies the unpardonable wrong of being completely successful, of being completely favoured by Fortune in their daring schemes.

When all Paris was divided between those who loved and hated the Guises, only one profession of faith was possible for Jeanne. To her they had come to represent everything baneful in heaven and on earth. And while a Cardinal governed Navarre in the absence of its Sovereign Lady, Jeanne is said to have amused herself in Paris by patronising the Huguenots.

One day Jeanne and Antoine appeared in the Pré-aux-Clercs, the most beautiful promenade of Paris of the day, where the Huguenots joined in the singing of the psalms which had been translated into French by Clement Marot. The Royal pair may have gone to view the scene out of curiosity, as did thousands of others. But Jeanne was now in a position in which she could not afford to gratify her curiosity, or play with fire, in defiance of the French Court. And playing with fire she was, for the psalms, far from being a dirge of humility and of penance, were in reality war-songs to which armies would presently march.

After the marriage of the Dauphin, Antoine left Paris for Navarre, while Jeanne remained at the French Court, where she now had a baby-girl, Catharine, to soften the loneliness and isolation that was hers in the midst of a gorgeous and luxurious entourage.

Antoine, meanwhile, on reaching Navarre, organised an expedition against Spain. But Antoine, though brave enough on the field, had not the genius, the industry, the patience necessary for such an enterprise. It came to nothing, and the opportunity of recovering the lost province by force of arms passed, never to return.

The unfavourable weather and the jealousies of the chiefs were blamed for the failure. But Antoine was commander-in-chief of the failure, and Jeanne was too proud, too stout of heart, to forget easily a fiasco which trumpeted to her enemies the weakness of her country and the incapacity of her consort.

The defeat of France at Gravelines on the 13th of July 1558 completed Jeanne's despair.

France had had her fill of fighting. So, indeed, had Spain. And from sheer exhaustion the belligerents should make peace.

The French Ambassadors to negotiate the peace included Montmorency, the Cardinal de Lorraine, and Marshal de St. André. And now Jeanne hoped and expected that Spain would be prevailed upon to make restitution to her. But in the conference hall there was no zealot for her cause. On the 15th of November 1558, while the negotiations were still in progress, Mary of England died and Philip of Spain was once more a widower. His mourning modified profoundly the political situation, for Philip was young, and would doubtless go a-wooing again, and until he had chosen a bride French statesmen would not know freedom from anxiety. Eventually a treaty of peace was signed at Cateau-Cambrésis, and the ambitions of Jeanne were sacrificed by Henry, as those of her father had been sacrificed by Francis I.

Jeanne blamed Montmorency for the extinction of her hopes. From the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Marshal de St. André she had expected nothing. Henceforth she expected nothing from anybody, and, bitterly disappointed, she and her husband, who had returned thither, left Paris.

But worse was to follow. Where should the widower of Madrid offer his hand—but at the Court of France to the charming Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the King and Catharine de' Medici? This engagement set the seal upon the humiliation



From a photograph by Anderson, Rome, after the painting in the Prado, Madrid, by Antonio More

MARY THE FIRST, QUEEN OF ENGLAND

of Navarre. It united her only friend, lukewarm as the friendship might be, with her irreconcilable enemy ; and while her enemy would remain, it robbed her of her solitary friend.

At the same time Margaret, daughter of Francis I. was betrothed to Philibert Emanuel of Savoy.

At midsummer 1559 Paris assumed its gayest trappings for the double wedding which was to consolidate the work of the peacemakers. From Madrid came the Duke of Alba to take possession of Madame Elizabeth in his master's name and carry her back to her new country.

For a brief space Paris forgot the disputes of the factions and threw itself with zest into the festivities and games that marked the occasion. Lists were set up under the Bastille, and thither day by day all Paris thronged to watch the chivalry of many lands do battle for the honour of the tourney. On the 29th of June Catharine de' Medici and her ladies watched the encounters. The King, superbly mounted, rode into the ring to break a lance with all comers. Guise, Nemours, the Prince of Ferrara, each covetous of distinction in such an arena, had each in turn to yield the palm to the King.

Then Henry's eye fell upon a young officer of the Guard, Gabriel de Lorges, the Count of Montgomery.

There were two lances unbroken, one for Montgomery and one for his master. The officer was unwilling to enter the lists, but the King would not be denied. The man chosen by Fate to be his destruction would thwart Fate and save the King. But Henry would not be saved. To the combat !

All eyes were turned upon the champions as their coursers galloped to the charge. The Queen's heart stood still. The gloom of impending disaster was upon her. . . .

As the knights collided and the lances splintered, a broken shaft pierced the King's visor and entered his brain. A moment he sat stock still ; then the hero of the day, the victor of so many jousts, rocked in his saddle and toppled to the dust, his life the forfeit of this last encounter.

Instantly there was wild commotion. From the galleries overlooking the arena courtiers and high officers thronged to where their master had fallen ; and in the midst of the excitement some one breathed a whisper that treason had been done, as if the King's own vanity had not been the real traitor !

From the lists they carried him to the Palais des Tournelles, and on the 10th of July, in the fortieth year of his age, Henry II. was a dead man, and his son, a delicate lad sadly unfitted for the arduous cares of such an office, was King of France.

CHAPTER VII

COLD CHEER AT ST. GERMAIN'S

MONTGOMERY'S lance had made a boy of only sixteen and a half years old King of France. Francis II. could not, however, hope to be anything more than King in name, surrounded as he was by factions who had no worthier ambition than their own aggrandisement.

On one side were naturally ranged the Princes of the Blood—that is to say, the members of the House of Bourbon—with Antoine as their chief. Opposed to them were the Guises, whose niece, Mary of Scotland, the young King's consort, possessed unbounded influence with her boy-husband, who therefore looked towards the House of Lorraine as the true buttress of his government.

Of lesser personages, Montmorency took sides with the Bourbons, while Marshal de St. André threw in his lot with the Guises. Not that the old Constable was averse to power even in association with the Queen's uncles. He was for the Bourbons because there was no room for him in the ranks of the opposing faction. Accustomed to fill the first place, Montmorency could not accommodate himself to a humbler post. The Guises had no use for a

Prime Minister. And a mere lieutenant the Constable of his own choice would not be.

The position of Catharine de' Medici in the new State should be one of hope rather than one of real power. If the Guises gained complete supremacy she would be a mere cipher. The success of the Bourbons could for her only have the same result. If, however, one fraction more or less balanced the other, there was some hope that the Queen-Mother would be counted by both as of some consequence.

The last scene in her husband's life had been enacted at the Palais des Tournelles. When his father had closed his eyes for ever, the Guises had the young King conveyed to the Louvre, to mark, as it were, the severance of all ties with the old regime and the beginning of a new order.

Catharine had for long, weary years played the part of a Griselda. The life-long indignity to which her husband had subjected her she had borne with the patience of a philosopher or a saint. But now she had done with philosophy and saintship. No mother is quite friendless when her son is the King. Deep down in his heart there is always something which makes him her protector, if not her ally. Henry, if roused, was capable of any crime against her. But Henry was gone, and the worst she now had to fear was that she should be ignored and forgotten.

Setting etiquette at defiance, Catharine followed the Court to the Louvre. There the new Government was being moulded, and there she would be.

The Guises began at the top of the ladder. The

Constable was old ; he needed a rest from the cares of State ! Let him have it !

Thus far the Queen-Mother and the Guises were unanimous. To the Guises Montmorency was only an obstinate old man who could never master the art of obedience. But to Catharine he was a bitter enemy who, in the day of his authority, had been rude to her, had overwhelmed her with insults that could never be forgotten. His ungovernable tongue had betrayed him into saying that of all Henry's children, none resembled their father save one, and that one was not Catharine's.¹ This deadly form of wit seems to have been generally employed at Court when opportunity arose, for Diana, it will be remembered, revenged herself in similar fashion on Henry when for a brief space his affections wandered from her.

A change of fortune had now, however, come for Diana as well as for the Constable.

She had been ordered from the palace while still the King lay dying, who during long years had been her faithful adorer.

"Is the King dead?" she asked.

"He still breathes," was the reply.

"Then," she answered, "no one has any power to command me." And she remained. But only for a brief spell was her reign prolonged. Having been obliged to surrender some of her ill-gotten wealth, she was banished to luxurious exile in the provinces.

Antoine and the other Bourbons were now

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

Montmorency's sole hope. To the King of Navarre the old Constable sent an urgent summons, entreating him to appear at Court and assume that place next the throne which by right of birth was his. But Antoine had lost the capacity, if it had ever been his, for rising to a great emergency. All his moral courage, all his resource, had vanished. Duty and self-interest called him to Paris post-haste. The man best adapted to the crisis would probably have been he who would have let all question of tactics wait upon the supreme need for appearing in the lists where the battle for power was to be waged. But Antoine behaved in a manner the very reverse of this. While the Guises were gathering up the reins of power, getting rid of their enemies, and winning over the tepid and vacillating, the King of Navarre left them a clear field.

Jeanne appealed to him to set out instantly for the capital. She knew full well that in politics the hand of friendship must be grasped the moment it is tendered if the overture is to be accepted at all. Montmorency was awaiting his coming. But Montmorency could not go on waiting for ever, for in his situation no man could stand alone. Catharine de' Medici, likewise, was waiting, but the Queen-Mother too should choose another colleague in the Government if Antoine would not hearken to her summons. Antoine's evil genius, Nicholas d'Angu, gave counsel the very opposite to that tendered by Jeanne. This man is said to have been a secret agent of the Guises. He opposed Antoine's departure for Paris, depicting all sorts of imaginary dangers that would be certain to

wait upon his attendance at Court. Descars, Antoine's chamberlain, was equally active in playing upon his master's fears. He held out to Antoine the cheerful prospect that if he went to Paris and found the Guises supreme there, he would probably lose his head.

Finding Antoine insensible to her advice, the Queen of Navarre appealed to Condé to assist her in awakening her consort to the call of duty. His brother's admonitions, coupled with the reproaches of his wife, eventually moved him to set out for the Court. At the last moment d'Angu tried to frighten him with the information "that in case the Princes of Lorraine were molested in the exercise of their functions as ministers by the Royal Princes, it was the intention of King Philip to create a diversion in their favour by directing the Spanish viceroy of Navarre to cross the frontier and invest Bayonne or Navarreins."

Jeanne, however, was prepared to face alone the worst that Madrid had in store for her. So Antoine went on his way northwards, but before doing so he had arranged that Condé, Coligny, and other notables should form part of his bodyguard to Paris. Very slowly, like one that would have been pleased at any excuse for turning back, Antoine advanced towards the capital. When he arrived there, the Court had, however, left for St. Germain's.

Thither he now proceeded. He had scarcely reached the end of his long journey when the folly and weakness of his dilatory policy were brought home to him. Before the whole Court he was taught his

bitter lesson. When he arrived the King was out hunting. His coming was of no more account to his Majesty than if he had been some third-rate grandee coming from the provinces to pay homage and sue for favour. His luggage, which had been sent on in advance, lay piled in the courtyard; and to crown this hospitable greeting he was indebted for apartments to St. André, who vacated his own to save a Prince of the Blood from the indignity of being housed in some remote attic.¹

By and by, when the King had had his sport and returned to the palace, Antoine was permitted to pay his respects. Then Francis, speaking his lesson like a parrot, conveyed to his kinsman the whole situation in a few words. "The administration," he said, "was in the hands of his uncles."

Still the enemies of the Guises advised Antoine to hold his ground. Something might happen to save them from the humiliation of having taken a long journey north only to be snubbed.

And something did happen, but not what Antoine and his advisers were hoping for.

Antoine appeared at the King's Council, as was his right, though it was equally true that there was no welcome for him there. Never, however, did councillor find a more overwhelming surprise awaiting him. In the midst of the proceedings a letter was read from the King of Spain, a letter that may well have sent a shiver through this trifler with great affairs, the Prince who was always waiting upon Fate, upon Chance, upon Miracles.

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

Philip's letter to Queen Catharine assured his mother-in-law that any attempt on the part of the factions to upset the established order would find him prepared to invade France with a large army in support of the King's Government.

Philip mentioned that forty thousand men were ready! These forty thousand were the reply of the Guises to all his belated schemes, for the road from Spain to France lay through the heart of Navarre. And if he dared raise a hand in Paris he would kindle a blaze in the Pyrenees that would lay his own roof-tree in ashes. Antoine's mission was at an end!

Checkmated and outwitted, the King of Navarre had not even the spirit to evince his chagrin. Instead of shaking the dust of the Court from his shoes and returning to his own kingdom, confident that the eternal jealousy of Frenchman and Spaniard would be his best shield against the dangers that threatened, the chief of the Bourbons elected to placate his enemies by obsequious complaisance.

The young Queen Elizabeth, who had been married by proxy to Philip on the eve of her father's fatal encounter with Montgomery, should now proceed to Spain; and who was chosen for the duty but Antoine! This man, therefore, who had left his home to assume the government of France, returned south in the service of the Guises, an envoy where he had claimed the right to be a master.

Having witnessed the coronation at Rheims of young Francis and his radiant consort, Antoine set out with Elizabeth for her new country.

CHAPTER VIII

KING FRANCIS THINKS OF MURDER

ANTOINE, without consulting Jeanne, endeavoured to open up negotiations with Philip with a view to arriving at some agreement for the restoration of Upper Navarre. But Antoine was snubbed for his pains. His diplomacy was as weak as his efforts at open conquest; and, completely baffled, nothing remained for him but to return to the Queen whose dignity and interests he had so foolishly compromised.

The young King's health was feeble, and all power was divided between the Duke of Guise and his brother the Cardinal de Lorraine.

Arrayed against them were the Princes of the House of Bourbon, whom they had robbed of the privileges and power which at this time they would, under other circumstances, have enjoyed without rivalry; a great number of nobles who disliked them as foreigners; and the whole body of the Huguenots, to whom the Guises were the most dauntless, the most implacable of their enemies. Tyranny in high places and inquisitorial methods had indeed made many men Huguenots who, left to themselves, would have taken no part in the religious troubles. Fanatics,

without charity or judgment, laid traps and set up tests of which the most eminent and worthy ecclesiastics disapproved. Religion had now, however, become hopelessly, tragically, involved in politics; and rivers of blood would deluge the fair land of France before the two should again be separated.

A common sentiment of hostility to the Guises united under the banner of the Huguenots all their enemies, and as the most distinguished of the malcontents, Antoine's brother Louis, Prince of Condé, became their chief.

In January 1560, measures were taken for kindling the flames of civil war. The author of the design imagined that he had found a way of ending at a blow the power of the Guises and the troubles of his friends. But this most brilliant scheme was brilliant only in the imagination of its author and the enthusiasts whom he succeeded in enlisting.

The idea was to appear in arms at Amboise, where the Court was sojourning, seize the Guises, and present to the King a statement of grievances. It is not certain that the King would have remained a free agent if this enterprise had succeeded. A youth of his type should fall under the influence of somebody; and into the shoes of the Guises, Huguenot dictators would doubtless have stepped with alacrity.

New dictators were not, however, to be required. The men in power knew how to preserve their places. Renaudie, the arch-conspirator, chattered of his great scheme to a lawyer, one Avenelles, who was glad to turn so precious a secret into ringing golden crowns.

The conspirators directly concerned expiated their folly at so terrible a price that the streets of Amboise ran red with blood.¹ At the windows of the château, the Queen-Mother, her three young sons, and the ladies of the Court watched the executions, "comme un divertissement."

The Prince of Condé was at Court, and was doubtless ready to profit by the uprising if it should prove successful. In the investigations that followed its failure he was implicated, mainly by hearsay evidence. But the Duke of Guise chose to be magnanimous, and protested to the King that he would answer for his innocence.

It is not easy to understand the Duke's magnanimity, unless indeed he felt somewhat the same contempt for Louis that he felt for Antoine. The Queen-Mother's sympathy with Condé is more easily explained. Condé was one of the few forces that helped to check, however feebly, the influence of the Guises. The policy of her House was "Qu'il faut diviser pour régner." The preservation of faction was therefore one of her cardinal principles.

Whatever the combination of motives that saved Condé, the Guises seem to have repented of their generosity. Their spies furnished them with plenty of evidence that Louis and Antoine were using their influence to produce a great national agitation. And both brothers were summoned to appear before the King at Orleans.

In this emergency Jeanne would have her husband and kinsman make the best excuses they could for

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

disobeying a command that she might well have believed was the prelude to dire misfortune. But Antoine could be obstinate when obstinacy was madness, and with Condé he repaired to Orleans. Hundreds of gentlemen volunteered to act as a guard of honour to the brothers. These volunteers did not misjudge the situation. The Bourbons were going to a place where such service would be sorely needed ; and too late they would regret having advanced alone into the arms of their enemies.

In October 1560 the Princes arrived at Orleans, and found themselves at once in the midst of a hostile army, but not altogether without friends.

Condé was forthwith placed under arrest, while Antoine was kept under close surveillance.

The course of events at Orleans coalesce into a few brief days much of the romantic glamour of the period. Late and early the tramp of armed men beat upon the ears of the captive Prince. If his friends were to serve him, they should be up and doing. But not by force could they hope to extricate him from the lions' den into which, with all the folly of his race, he had so lightly thrown himself. To a Bourbon it always seemed that his blood was a sufficient talisman to avert from him the designs of his worst enemies. But to the Guises it was no talisman at all. If they could compass it, Orleans would witness the end for him, at all events—perhaps the end for both brothers. For though Antoine was charged with no crime, in this city of sixteenth-century France there was a mode of trial followed by quick dispatch for which no judge was needed—

nothing but a dagger or a cup of poison, and a silent, steady hand.

Now, beneath the surface of Court life where the lovely Mary of Scotland reigned supreme, dark deeds were being planned, of which Jeanne d'Albret herself has told the story.

According to Jeanne, while still Condé's trial was in progress, the Guises made up their minds to assassinate Antoine. Such evidence cannot of course be accepted as conclusive, more especially as she had it from so untrustworthy a witness as her husband.

Jeanne declares that the first attempt to destroy Antoine was at a banquet, by poison.¹ He was, however, warned in time. Next he was to have been shot as he made his way home in the dark from attendance on the King. Luckily for the King of Navarre, the old Constable and his son, with their attendants, accompanied him on his walk, and guarded him so closely that the marksman could not fulfil his commission without risking a general *mêlée*.

These two enterprises having failed, a third, according to the same authority, was undertaken. This time the assassin was to be no less a person than the King himself.

Jeanne relates that the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Duke of Guise, the Marshal de St. André, and some others were parties to the scheme of murder. This was as simple as it was cowardly and unprincipled.

The King clad in his night robe, as though ill—as in truth he often was—should send for Antoine to come to his bed-chamber. Thither the Bourbon

¹ "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

would come, little suspecting treachery under the Sovereign's roof. The King should force a quarrel upon his visitor, which would be easy enough, seeing that Antoine was under a cloud as the friend of conspirators, while his brother lay a captive a little way off, in peril of his life. Then in a simulated frenzy Francis should snatch from his girdle the dagger placed there for this service and stab his luckless kinsman. After the manner of courtiers of the age, those present would see that the work begun by their master was completed. And there would be no King of Navarre, no one to avenge Condé, no Royal chief to lead the Huguenots when he also should have been dispatched.

Catharine de' Medici received a hint of the black crime premeditated. Whenever Catharine did a good action, it was attributed to the basest motives ; when she did otherwise, it was accepted as quite in keeping with her character. Now she played the part of Antoine's guardian angel. She warned him of his peril, but whether from motives of humanity or for the cynical reason that she would not willingly see so sharp a thorn removed from the path of the Guises, is a question that rival disputants may go on arguing eternally. At all events Antoine was warned, and if he were fool enough to go unprepared to pay his respects to the King of France while his Majesty was still in his nightgown, his blood would be on his own head.

Jeanne, in her memoirs, refers more than once to the opposition shown by a certain influential section of the Court to this atrocious plot. The Queen-Mother was probably the mouthpiece of this opposi-

tion. But at length the King's hardihood was screwed to murder-point, and Antoine was sent for. Antoine, on his guard, made some excuse. Again the Royal command reached him.

This time Antoine, who could never be prudent, or indeed anything for long, resolved to obey, prompted by some dare-devil spirit to behold the scene where his enemies had planned he should make his exit from this world.

He did not, however, go alone. If exit there was to be from this troubled sphere, Antoine was determined that he should not go forth alone to the dwellings of the shades.

He brought with him a trusty officer, his comrade from childhood, one Captain Jacques de Ranty, a stout fighter whose blade would not be idle if hard blows were going.

Scarcely had they reached the Royal abode when further warnings were given them. A friendly voice arrested Antoine as he approached the Royal chamber.

"Sire," said the voice, "are you going to seek destruction?"

But Antoine's blood was up. He would go on now were the devil himself beyond that threshold where lay the stage upon which he had come hither to play his part.

His only reply was to impart to Ranty his last injunctions.

"I am going," he said, "to the place where my death has been decreed. But never was a skin sold more dearly than I shall sell mine. If it pleases God, He will save me. But I beg you by your well-trying

fidelity, and the love I have always borne you, to do me this final service, that if I lose my life, you will recover my shirt, and, red with blood, carry it to my wife and son; and conjure my wife by the great love she has always shown me, and by her duty, since my son is not yet of an age to avenge me, to send my shirt, torn and blood-stained as it will be if I fall, to foreign princes, that they may avenge my death, so cruel and so treacherous!"¹

With these words—and Antoine ever had the gift of expression—he strode forward. The door of the presence-chamber swung open, and the doomed man entered the Royal circle.

The door was closed by the Cardinal de Lorraine. At such hands it must have seemed to the King of Navarre an ominous service. But there was no time for womanish trouble about omens. The King was speaking.

Francis played well the opening of his part. He was rude to the Prince. Antoine was courteous and dutiful. Poor Francis! He had not bargained for shedding the blood of a man who could be his father, his own kinsman, whose manner was one of humble reverence.

The moments passed. There was question and reply, but no dagger. The great plot, so simple, so effective, had failed.

Antoine looked round with a challenge. His lowly reverence was for the King alone.

The Guises retired to the deep embrasure of a window. Then one said to the other:

"Voilà le plus poltron cœur qui fût jamais!"

¹ "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

CHAPTER IX

CONDE'S NEW LEASE OF LIFE

HAPPY was it for Francis that he had stayed his hand when Antoine was at his mercy. For at the moment when evil advisers had—according to Jeanne—thrust into his girdle the dagger which was to dispatch his kinsman, his own doom was sealed.

He fell ill with an abscess in the ear; then his throat became affected. Modern science would probably have saved his life with ease; but when the abscess broke, the poison probably penetrated to the brain, and after a reign of only a year and a half, Francis II., the best of the Valois, was no more.

The boy's death made Catharine mistress of the kingdom. The new King, her next son, now Charles IX., was only nine years old. There was no Mary Stuart to separate him from his mother. Mary and her formidable uncles remained. But while yesterday they were members of the Royal House, to-day they were but a faction.

The obsequies of Francis reminded the world of what small account is a dead King. The Guises could not spare time from politics to lay their late



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Clouet

CHARLES IX. IN 1570

master to rest. And men in bitter irony coined the memorable phrase :

"Where is Taneguy du Chastel?"¹

Taneguy had ventured to return unbidden from exile to pay the tribute of his mourning homage at the tomb of Charles VII. The Guises, however, were politicians, not knight-errants who could spare time for gratitude. And Taneguy's memory was without a rival, if rivalry it could be called, that men who had only benefits to acknowledge should perform the simple homage done by one who had, as he thought, suffered wrong.

Catharine's secret thoughts at this time must ever remain a fascinating problem of character, a problem that can never be solved.

The King of Navarre was the young King's natural protector. Had he been a Prince of a different stamp he would have claimed the Regency, and nobody could have withstood his pretensions. Catharine was a foreigner—a foreigner, it is true, with some qualities that were very French. But her Italian blood could not be forgiven her. The Guises, too, were foreigners. They had numerous enemies amongst the nobility, who were jealous that interlopers and strangers should appropriate so many dignities and be so greedy of power. But Antoine had found his level in the esteem of friends and enemies. He could never be leader of the nation.

In the new circumstances that had arisen, it suited Catharine to enlist in her service the Prince who should have been the King's governor, had he

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

been worthy of his birth. She chose him for the humbler part of rallying round the throne the Bourbon Princes and their adherents, as a counterbalance to the ambition of the Guises.¹

Condé was to have died on the 26th of November. The scaffold was raised before the King's lodgings. His head was to have fallen in presence of the whole Court. The deed was to have been but the first of a series of official murders in which Coligny and Montmorency, and indeed all the chief enemies of the ambition of the Guises, were to have been numbered amongst the victims.

On the 16th of November Francis had fallen ill. When the doctors despaired of his life, the Guises desired to hasten Condé's end. They also wished to arrest the King of Navarre, and with short shrift launch him into eternity. But the Queen-Mother had no mind for such crimes while her son lay in his death-agony. And so when Francis closed his eyes, the scaffold that rose before his door was still unstained with the blood of a victim, and Condé had succeeded to a new lease of life.

Though he was at liberty to go where he pleased when the King had ceased to breathe, Condé, strangely enough, refused to avail himself of his freedom. Resolved to extract all possible advantage from his happier situation, he refused to quit his prison, in the hope that his enemies would venture to pursue their charges, when there was a good chance that he and they would change places. But his accusers were shrewder politicians than the captive.

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

They realised to the full the uncertainty of the times. They were silent. In Orleans everybody was now Condé's friend.

The Prince demanded to know by what means he had been condemned to the scaffold. The Guises replied that all that had been done was by command of the King alone. And, pursued by the congratulations of men who had recently kept guard over him, he rode away to rejoin his friends. Never again would he trust his head within the lions' jaws. Rash as he was by nature, Louis de Condé had doubtless come to apprehend that not every day would fate strike down a King to save his life.

Catharine was now forty-two years old, with six young children, including the King, still living. Never had woman served a longer, a more bitter apprenticeship before becoming mistress in her own house than had this accomplished Florentine. Another woman would have been crushed to the earth by the humiliations that were hers during the long years that had elapsed from the time of her coming to France, a mere slip of a girl, until her husband's death. But her supple mind, her elastic spirits, and certain qualities of judgment, certain habits of thought that were almost philosophic, had saved Catharine from premature decay. And now in early middle life she had ample energy and zest for the extraordinary battle for power that lay before her.

The King of Navarre was enlisted amongst her friends by his appointment as Lieutenant of the Kingdom. The edicts against Huguenots were no

longer enforced with severity, and Huguenot nobles and their dependants thronged to the Court.

From the outset Antoine behaved with a smallness of mind that seemed to grow upon him with the years. In trivial matters he was madly jealous of the Guises. His best protection against them was Catharine's own fears. There was no danger whatever that she would raise up for herself taskmasters who would brook no contradiction. But Antoine was filled with trepidation when the Queen-Regent showed them the least courtesy. So utterly had he lost his sense of proportion that he became the laughing-stock of the Court.

In one instance Antoine's peevish intolerance went very near to inflicting serious damage on his own position. The Duke of Guise was Grand Master of the Royal Household. In this capacity he was custodian of the keys of the palace. Antoine chose to challenge his privilege in this respect; he demanded that the keys should be carried to him.¹ It was only a trivial matter, but Antoine treated it as a critical affair of State. It was, of course, impossible for Catharine to ignore custom at the bidding of the Lieutenant. Antoine, however, would not be placated; he would make no allowance for the difficulties of the Queen-Regent. He was fool enough to think that by such petty insults he could drive the Guises out of the field. But Catharine knew better. She would not, and indeed dare not, yield to his wishes in this matter. And Antoine, in high dudgeon, threatened to retire from Court, carrying with him

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

all the Princes of the Blood and the old Constable. He declared that he would lead his party to Paris, there to deliberate on the whole question of the government of the State, leaving the Queen and her friends, the Guises, in the solitude of Fontainebleau.

In this perilous emergency Catharine acted with infallible intuition. Divining that Antoine would do nothing if left to himself, she defeated him by the simple device of detaching from him the ally who at the moment was of most consequence to him. This was de Montmorency. The Constable, like Catharine herself, was at this period somewhat uncertain in his partisanship; if he could be detained at Fontainebleau, there was little danger that Antoine would set out without him. The Queen-Regent, therefore, sent for the Constable and commanded him in the name of the King, in the presence of four secretaries of State, not to abandon his Sovereign. Montmorency wanted but an excuse to remain. He was not in love with the Guises, but he saw no occasion to quarrel about the keys of the palace, and, in doing so, leave the King in the hands of the House of Lorraine. Glad of an excuse for deserting his party, when desertion meant common sense, he yielded ready obedience. Catharine's intuition was vindicated. Fearful lest Montmorency should pass over to his enemies if he left him behind, Antoine decided to remain; and Catharine, as a peace-offering, increased the powers of the Lieutenancy.

In the end, however, Antoine's folly was to lose him the valuable support of the old Constable. The King of Navarre, bent upon injuring the Guises,

desired an inquiry to be held into the administration of the finances during the previous reigns. The House of Lorraine heard of this proposal with equanimity. They had reaped much honour, as it was esteemed, in the service of France; but they were reputed to have lost more gold than they had gained. Not so Montmorency. There were transactions in connection with the Treasury in which he had been a gainer, and which, in his opinion, were best forgotten. Antoine, therefore, in pressing inquiry in this matter, was successful, with his usual fatuity, in losing a friend without damaging his enemy. Montmorency, moved by the advice of some of his closest friends, cooled in his ardour for the Bourbons and began to lean towards the Guises.

Out of this new grouping of the factions arose the Triumvirate—the Duke of Guise, the Marshal de St. André, and the Constable.

De Montmorency's change of front was effected under circumstances that afford an eloquent if droll illustration of the policy that passed for high political strategy.¹

"Honour," says the historian, "would not permit the Constable to ally himself openly with the Duke of Guise whilst the Prince of Condé was at enmity with him." He therefore begged the Queen to make peace, so far as mere lip-professions could do so. Both were summoned to the presence of the King, and there with the Princes and Cardinals and great officers of State to witness the solemn comedy, the Duke pledged his word to Condé that he had

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

been in no way to blame for his imprisonment at Orleans.

The Prince, as in duty bound, played the part expected from him. But he was fully conscious of the farce.

"Whoever had done it was a wicked traitor!" declared Condé.

The Duke acquiesced. It was indeed so. Nobody could denounce such villainy too roundly!

That was enough. The boy-King had been carefully tutored in his part. These honest gentlemen had sadly misunderstood each other! But all suspicions were now dissolved! The climax of this delicious make-believe had come. Young Charles ordered them to embrace each other, and they did so with alacrity. Had he ordered them to spit at each other, they would have been no less prompt in their obedience. A minute of this State entertainment was drawn up with all formality and signed by two secretaries of State, while the distinguished audience retired from the presence to laugh in their sleeves at the ceremonious fraud.

CHAPTER X

JEANNE BECOMES A HUGUENOT

TO trace the web of intrigue that was woven throughout France and Navarre during the year 1561 would be a baffling task. In Court and château, north and south, all the great figures of the period played their part in spinning that endless scheme. The year marked a turning-point in the life of Jeanne d'Albret. She who in her youth preferred a dance to a sermon was henceforth the High-Priestess of tragedy.

The news that reached Navarre after the death of Francis II. decided her to make bold and open profession of the Huguenot faith.

She was encouraged in this step by Antoine's letters from the Court, for to this most superficial observer it seemed that Catharine was an assured friend of toleration, and that the power of Rome in France was doomed to speedy ruin. Vain of his new importance, Antoine invited his Consort to join him at Court. Catharine de' Medici also wrote in the same strain; and, as a token of her goodwill, proposed a betrothal between her little boy, Henry, Duke of Anjou, and little Catharine, Jeanne's four-year-old daughter. Jeanne, however, shrewder

than her husband, was in no hurry to exchange the security of her mountain fastnesses for the hospitality of a Court where she trusted nobody, a Court which only a little while before had awaited with serenity the decapitation of her brother-in-law, and would have accepted in a spirit, at least as cheerful, the condemnation of her husband.

Meanwhile the young King, accompanied by his mother, the King of Navarre, and all the great officers, had reached Fontainebleau, whither Mary Stuart had departed in tears for her own land. Here a picture was presented which depicted in miniature the anarchy that had taken possession of the kingdom. The Huguenot nobles took leave to regard Catharine as half a Huguenot, while Antoine they regarded as wholly theirs. The young King was of course a negligible quantity. They felt, therefore, that the chief influences in the State were on their side. Protestant services were held in the open air within the palace precincts, and, from day to day, prudent men were quite prepared to witness an open collision between the champions of the opposing creeds.

Amongst the foreign grandees who witnessed this perilous confusion and total contempt for decorum or authority were the Papal Nuncio, Prosper de St. Croix, and the Spanish Ambassador, Thomas de Chantonnay. From a letter written by the latter to his Royal master, it appears that Louis de Condé and Coligny were the leaders of the Huguenot faction at Fontainebleau. They intended doubtless by their boldness to make it appear that the Regent was in favour of complete equality as between Catholics

and Huguenots, which, considering the circumstances of the time, could only mean that she desired the ultimate supremacy of the latter. Their extravagance, however, very soon had the effect of defeating the end in view, for we find the Spanish Ambassador writing to Philip :

“ The day after Easter Sunday the *prêches* which were publicly holden in the grand Court of Fontainebleau, before the lodgings of the Admiral de Coligny, the Prince of Condé assisting thereat, have been forbidden, so that from henceforth it is not lawful for any person to have, or to hear, other preachers when at Court, excepting him who is appointed to officiate before the King and the very Christian Queen. God grant that this command may be observed ! ” ¹

Catharine, however, true to her policy of trimming and balancing, endeavoured at the same time to conciliate the Huguenots by various favours. She caused the French Ambassador to the Vatican to raise certain questions of Church discipline and practice rather than of doctrine. The reception of the Communion under both forms and the substitution of French for Latin in the prayers of the Church were two of the points raised. It is very doubtful indeed if Catharine did not take care to undo in secret what she did in public. Her object was achieved when she gratified Coligny and his friends by preparing the way for a conflict, and, if expedient, a rupture, with the Pope.

About this time Catharine again wrote to Jeanne begging her to delay no longer in coming to Court.

¹ Freer, “ Life of Jeanne d’Albret.”

The Queen-Regent informed her, in so many words, that the presence of his Consort was necessary if any check was to be imposed upon Antoine's vagaries.

The sport of every flattering tongue, of every intriguer, of every cheat and spy, the head of the House of Bourbon was on all hands a subject of ridicule, his name a byword for insane credulity. He could serve no interest with consistency and sincerity, least of all his own interest and his wife's.

There was one phase of Antoine's life at Court which Catharine refrained from mentioning to the Queen of Navarre. She was silent as to his relations with a beautiful girl, one of her own maids-of-honour, the daughter of a noble family of Brittany. Catharine is accused of having deliberately planned that Louise de Beraudière de Rouet should ensnare Antoine's affections and make him a traitor to his Consort. Little scheming was, however, necessary to make Antoine the slave of the bewitching Breton. The yoke of marriage was for Antoine an easy burden ; its vows, fetters not meet to bind a Royal gallant. There was no need for Catharine to plot his downfall, for he was his own most persistent tempter, the surest foe of peace in his own household. The whole Court knew that he was in love with Louise, and for the remaining days of his life this beautiful Breton was mistress of his affections, and even, it is said, cherished the hope of one day being his Queen.

In July 1561 Jeanne at length made up her mind that she should go to Paris. She no longer had any misgivings as to her safety in the capital. But whatever she might have to encounter there, she could

no longer rest where she was. If the Queen-Regent was silent concerning the maid-of-honour who had entered her husband's life and banished from it for ever his wife, other correspondents did not spare her the discovery of this cruel secret. To Paris, therefore, she would go, and for the sake of her children, whom she would bring with her, she would rescue her husband, if indeed it were possible, from the toils of the enchantress.

August was drawing to a close when Jeanne arrived in the capital and took up her abode in the Hôtel de Condé, Rue de Grenelle. Catharine wished the Queen of Navarre to be her guest at the Louvre, whither the Court had now returned. But Jeanne preferred for the moment the hospitality of her brother-in-law. In his house there was less room for spies and treachery than in the King's palace. It was more convenient, too, for quiet meetings with her friends. For Jeanne had her own web to spin, her own plans to mature. Last, but not least, at the Louvre she would have to share the same roof-tree as Louise.

During the months immediately following, the Queen-Regent seems to have fallen in love with the resolute Princess from the south, who, afraid of neither King nor factions, full of confidence in herself, so frank in her enmities, was something of an enigma to the supple, intriguing, and many-faced Florentine.

The two Queens were continually in conference.¹ Their understanding was complete—or so thought

¹ "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

Jeanne. Both had come to recognise that Antoine was but a straw on the waves. Sensitive to the most contrary impulses, he was the low comedian of the political drama to all who could afford to laugh at his performance. To Jeanne it was, however, no laughing matter. She was his partner. Those who laughed at him laughed at her. Nor could the Queen-Regent, despite her finer sense of humour, her more critical, more cynical, more detached temperament, afford to be merely amused. She had tried to purchase his fidelity by making him Lieutenant-General of the kingdom. And in a sense she had done so. But no titles, no dignities, could endow him with the gift of common sense. As a handsome figure-head he was in his proper place. But he had no perception of his own shortcomings, and ambitious of travelling faster than his allies, of leading them, of surprising them with his talents, they were continually apprehensive that he would ruin everything.

To the Queen-Regent's apartments came tidings that in the circle of the Court there were no faster friends than Chantonnay and Antoine. It was the business of the former to make Catharine dependent upon Spain. It was Antoine's business to render her independent of Philip by attracting to the ranks of her supporters the Frenchmen who could make and unmake her. What passed between Antoine and Chantonnay she could not tell. But it was necessary that she should penetrate their secret, confident as she was that their friendship was more likely to serve Philip's ambitions than her own. The instrument

chosen by the Medici to unravel this new complication was Jeanne d'Albret.

The Queen of Navarre, at all events, could not be deceived by Chantonnay; nor would the latter be likely to practise his arts upon her. The line of attack was different. Catharine counted on Jeanne being able to obtain Antoine's confidence, when the two Queens, acting in concert, could defeat the schemes of the Spanish Ambassador.¹

The Queen of Navarre, trusting in the sincerity of the Queen-Regent's professions of friendship, readily lent herself to her schemes. And the former has left it on record that as their alliance progressed she assisted Catharine to play the eavesdropper upon all those whom she distrusted. Jeanne tried to fathom the machinations of her husband—probably no difficult task—and then faithfully carried to Catharine her gleanings. But the Queen was not content with second-hand intelligence. She arranged secret hiding-places where she could hear with her own ears all that passed between the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Cardinal de Tournon, Descars, St. André, and the King of Navarre at their meetings in the apartments of Antoine or elsewhere in the palace. During those days the very walls had ears! The Queen-Regent's spies were everywhere, and sometimes the tapestries hanging from the ceiling to the floor concealed listeners who hurried from their dangerous posts to inform their Royal mistress of all that they had overheard.

When the Court left Paris for Fontainebleau the

¹ "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

Queen of Navarre should perforce accompany it or leave the field in the hands of her enemies. At this time Jeanne must have entertained high hopes for the triumph of her party, for the Queen-Regent was her inseparable friend and companion, ever ready to give ear to her counsel! But these ladies were too astute, too ambitious, for lasting friendship. Their interests might have followed parallel lines if they had been the only two persons of subtle wit, of resolute courage, of vaulting aspirations, associated with the Government. It was, however, far otherwise. It was the business of men as gifted, as unscrupulous as either, to separate them.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONFERENCE OF POISSY

THE evils that distracted France were too deep-seated to be remedied by a company of Royal intriguers and their partisans. The young King, or those who represented him, should perforce reap the harvest that had been sown by his ancestors. Difficulties—religious, political, financial—were all hopelessly interwoven.

The degradation that had come upon religion in the country was due to a variety of causes. Had Francis I. lived long enough, his insensate ambitions would have gone far to extirpate Christianity altogether and retard for generations the normal progress of civilisation. As it was, what passed for the glories of his reign were purchased at a heavy, a tragic price. Incessant wars had reduced the poor to unimaginable depths of misery. Men who ranked little higher than the brutes of the field can hardly have realised that theirs were immortal souls. Their hands, their sweat, their blood, had their value ; and after that they were carrion, of no use to King or country. Under such conditions religion could not flourish ; it should, indeed, die. Gentleness, love, and charity are the only sermons that ignorant men,

ground to the dust, can understand, the only ones they can appreciate. In France, in high places, these things did not exist. Lust of power, of wealth, of what passed for great achievements, had extinguished them.

The State, which in the early days had been the protector of the Church, now held it in bondage. Royal and aristocratic patronage had helped it in the days of its infancy. But in its prime they planted in it the seeds of its downfall. The more important benefices had attached to them princely revenues: these were prizes eagerly coveted by sons of the greatest families. That these men often had no vocation for the sanctuary did not matter; unscrupulous patrons were always ready to provide for them some vacant abbey or see. It would, of course, be untrue to say that men of exalted birth did not often make worthy ecclesiastics. Those of them, however, who set up as persons of fashion or applied themselves to gaining promotion at Court, to the utter neglect of their spiritual charges, inflicted by the wordliness of their lives irreparable injury upon the Church.

The new opinions were taken up readily by a proportion of the common people, who, steeped in ignorance, had no knowledge whatever of the theological and historical merits of the points at issue. The Church had come in their minds to be associated with the Court, with great nobles, with tyrannical governors, with faithless bishops nominated by the King, who, immersed in secular affairs, were often, doubtless, only bishops in name. Honest

men naturally desired to give back to the Church her own, to make her servants really Churchmen; and some of them doubtless thought that Huguenoterie was the way to do this. But there were men of a different class—men who, weary of the Valois, weary perhaps altogether of kings, saw in the new theology an opportunity of undermining a throne which they dared not openly assail. The coalition of these classes complicated the situation. But to render it perfectly hopeless, it was necessary that a third class should join them. This was the Court faction, who hoped to advance its own ends by manipulating the elements of popular unrest. Of these last the leaders were the Bourbon Princes, with Antoine and his brother Condé at their head. And of them it could be said, with little fear of injustice, that no creed was of half so much importance to them as their pleasure and their interest.

Broadly, then, the State was divided between two aristocratic factions—one led by Guise, the other by the Bourbons, or, as they said, “the Princes.” People with faith enough, or ambition and energy enough, to do so would, if occasion required, take their stand under either banner; but the great mass of people would hold aloof, leaving the problems to settle themselves. The attitude of this last class was one with which Catharine de’ Medici could heartily sympathise. She too would let things drift, if she could. But she could not. Greedy of power, she had no power; and to add to her perplexities, her purse was empty.

It was impossible to replenish the Treasury

adequately by further exactions from either nobles, citizens, or peasantry. Of the nobles she was afraid. The citizens, too, were formidable. From the peasantry she could expect nothing. From year to year the blood of their children had watered the battlefields of the Valois; their sweat had fertilised the fair plains of France. But the harvest had not been for them; they had sown that their betters might reap. They were literally bled white. The Church lands and revenues remained! The plunder of rich abbeys had often in the past reduced theological controversies to their simplest terms, had often, indeed, dissolved them altogether. Something of this kind was now perhaps anticipated. The States-General were called together to consider the finances of the realm. It was arranged, however, that the ecclesiastics should not sit with the other orders. The laymen were to deliberate at Pontoise; the spiritual peers at Poissy. And while the former were engaged in solving the difficulties of the Exchequer, the latter were to restore unity of faith to the kingdom, if it were possible to do so.

This conference at Poissy played so important a part in the career of Queen Jeanne that its circumstances need to be explained somewhat fully.

The Cardinal de Lorraine was regarded as the chief of the Catholic clergy. His Eminence agreed that the meeting of clergy at Poissy should be made the occasion of a conference with the Huguenot divines. The Cardinal had some reputation as an orator. It is said that he hoped to dazzle his opponents with his eloquence, to convince them

with his erudition.¹ Meanwhile, the Court betook itself to St. Germain, which was convenient to both Poissy and Pontoise.

The assembly at Pontoise was opened by the young King, and proved most suspiciously docile to the Queen-Regent's policy. As to the national debt, they threw the whole burden upon the clergy. They enacted, indeed, their complete spoliation.

It was, however, impossible to pack the assembly at Poissy with men who would be content to register a bargain agreeable to the Court.

The Chancellor l'Hôpital, a man after the Queen's own heart, was (what we should call to-day) the "wirepuller" upon whose skilful manipulation of the opposing forces the success of the colloquy depended. Catharine and the Chancellor, bent solely upon ruling others, were ready to refine propositions and restate doctrines until what they meant and what they did not mean would depend entirely upon the will and perhaps upon the imagination of the interpreter. The great object to be attained was a degree of ambiguity that would embrace conflicting opinions. Everything was to be settled by unsettling everything.

The conferences at Poissy were held in the refectory of the convent. On the 9th of September they were opened by the King, who went there in State, accompanied by his mother, by his brother the Duke of Orleans, and by the Princes and great officers of the Crown. Prominent in the Royal procession were the King and Queen of Navarre.

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

Heaven alone knows with what hopes Antoine entered the conference-chamber. Incapable of clear thinking, with no definite end in view, it is doubtful if his sympathies were whole-heartedly on either side. For Jeanne it was a day of triumph. It was something that the Huguenots were being permitted to meet cardinals and bishops and famous doctors on equal terms to vindicate their faith, and overwhelm, as she must have fervently hoped, their opponents.

The Huguenots were represented by ten divines, of whom the most eminent was Théodore de Bèze, the friend of Calvin, and the chief after him of the Church of Geneva. Pierre Martyr Vermiglio, well known in England, and at this time chief of the Church of Zürich, was also present. The Chancellor l'Hôpital opened the proceedings. He was perhaps the only man present who really expected a compromise. He knew that his Royal mistress was a very Princess of Opportunists. He, too, was an Opportunist, and what he deemed expedient he said, and as to the rest he was silent.

After the Chancellor had spoken, the venerable Cardinal de Tournon wished to deliberate with the clergy. But the Queen-Regent was impatient. She would settle all the controversies at a sitting, and bade Théodore de Bèze proceed.

As soon as the Huguenot speaker reached that portion of his discourse in which he spoke of the Commemoration of the Last Supper, Catharine's mistake must at once have begun to dawn upon her. Between the two schools represented there, there could be no agreement.

De Bèze declared that the Body of Jesus Christ was as far removed from the Blessed Eucharist as earth is from Heaven.¹ To the great majority of those present this was blasphemy, and the hall became a scene of uproar and wild excitement.

The Huguenot champion seems to have changed his ground a little. He tried, to some extent, to soften his profession of faith, or want of it, and to appease the Queen. But the *sauve* Chancellor had coined in vain his smoothest platitudes. Poissy was not to be the scene of a great reconciliation.

The sitting closed with an appeal from the venerable Cardinal de Tournon to the King to suspend his judgment on what he had heard until the arguments of the Huguenot minister had been answered. The Cardinal de Lorraine undertook the task of refuting de Bèze.

The sitting was adjourned until the 16th of September, when the whole Court assisted as before at the conference, the King and Queen of Navarre being amongst the brilliant company.

The Cardinal commenced by declaring that, in temporal matters, he and all the bishops and clergy offered implicit obedience to the throne. But in all that related to spiritual matters, it was the duty of the King to obey the Church. The bishops were the representatives of the Church, and it was in the capacity of judges that the bishops were present in the hall. It was as judges they would pronounce on the questions that had been raised. But meanwhile they regarded those separated from them as brothers whom

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

they would gladly welcome back to the fold when they had been convinced of their error. He did not propose to follow in detail all the arguments that had been raised on the other side. He would content himself with establishing two fundamental truths—the authority of the Church in spiritual affairs, and the doctrine of the Real Presence.

When he had done, the bishops and doctors declared that he had fully established his propositions.

The Cardinal de Tournon, carried away by his zeal, declared that men who remained insensible to such arguments were not sincere in their search for truth; and appealed to the young King to drive the Huguenots from his presence if they failed to subscribe immediately to these two articles. De Bèze, however, claimed the right to reply; and Catharine, surfeited with theology, adjourned the sitting.

By this time the Queen-Regent must have begun to fear that she had meddled in a dispute which, to her an academic, a trivial affair, an affair of words, was in grim truth a subject destined to separate more widely the opposing parties the more it was debated.

During the adjournment Hippolyte d'Este, Cardinal de Ferrara, arrived from Rome as Legate of the Holy See. Thus far Catharine had been almost openly in favour of the Huguenots. The nobles and ladies who surrounded her were either of that party by conviction, or, with the true instinct of courtiers, began to modify their opinions to suit the new fashion. The arrival of the Legate seems, in some unaccountable way, to have set in motion new influences which gradually

altered everything. Perhaps the Italian Cardinal understood the workings of the Queen-Regent's mind better than her French advisers. If she had faith, he knew how to stir it to new life. If she had only prejudices or fears or ambitions to work upon, his success in making them aid his point of view was not the less remarkable. The friend in their day of Francis I. and of Henry II., the kinsman of Guise, he had soon acquired ascendancy over the mind of Catharine. He was successful in making her see that the conference of Poissy, as organised by her, was a blunder. She had surrounded it with too much ceremony ; too much had been made to depend upon the remote possibility of a bargain being struck. All the ceremony had, as a matter of fact, only made peace more difficult. The presence of the King, and the King and Queen of Navarre and all the Court, had put the champions upon their mettle. The orators were in search of laurels ; they were impelled to seek victory rather than the lines upon which surrender might be made more easy.

When the sittings were resumed, the hall was no longer crowded with a great array of ecclesiastics, nor was the King present. The Queen-Regent, however, came, attended by Antoine and the other Princes of the Blood. Jeanne in all probability was also present. Five bishops and some doctors represented the Catholics, the Huguenot delegates being as before.

The aged Cardinal de Tournon, who had shown by his outburst on the previous occasion that his temper was too ardent for the business in hand, was

not now numbered amongst the champions of the Church.

Théodore de Bèze opened the debate, and was followed by Pierre Martyr; while two doctors of the Sorbonne replied. The Cardinal de Lorraine had prepared a serious blow for his opponents which was to fall at this juncture. Some of Luther's followers had agreed to come forward and support the doctrine of the Real Presence as the true interpretation of the Confession of Augsburg.¹ At the last moment, however, they did not appear, lest their testimony on this supreme issue should make the triumph of the Catholics too easy, too overwhelming.

De Bèze, however, thought it expedient to return again to this point. He now restated his belief in very different terms from those which had marked his first bold declaration.

"Faith," he said, "renders that present which was promised, and makes the faithful find, by the efficacy of the Word, the presence of the true Body and Blood of Christ."

The Catholic position was that the doctrine of the Real Presence implied a miracle. De Bèze's new declaration was milder than the old; it implied something perhaps of mystery and mysticism, but not a miracle of the altar performed by the celebrant. It was therefore a victory for the Cardinal de Lorraine. He had shaken the mountain; but, none the less, the mountain remained where it was.

De Bèze's revised confession of faith was likewise a triumph for the Legate. The smaller, the less

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

ceremonious conference, had made it easier for Geneva to bend a little.

But the genius necessary to turn to account this concession, if indeed any height of genius could do so, was not present. As the discussion progressed, there was a fresh outburst of bitterness, and the third sitting left the theologians almost exactly where they had been at the first meeting. Not so the Queen-Regent—she, at least, had learned that the way to confirm men in their opinions is to engage them in public disputation.

Catharine, therefore, took council with her Huguenot friends as to what should be done if the assembly of Poissy was not to prove a complete fiasco. At their persuasion she choose five divines from either party, and bade them agree upon a formula concerning the Commemoration of the Last Supper that would be acceptable to both schools.

The ten obeyed her Majesty, and composed a declaration, so ambiguous, that it seemed to embrace the faith of all. For a moment Catharine appeared to have achieved a glorious triumph. In full session under the presidency of the Cardinal de Lorraine, the clergy approved of the form that had been agreed upon. But the more critical doctors of the Sorbonne condemned it as captious, insufficient, and heretical. Catharine's last effort to effect a treaty of peace had failed. And the conference of Poissy had only served to demonstrate the unity and strength of the Church in France.

Still Catharine clung to her Huguenot friends. They had their services at St. Germain's, under

the eyes of Nuncio and Legate. The Queen of Navarre was their leader ; the Queen-Regent was their discreet patron. Antoine was all things to all men. And while the situation grew daily more acute, more menacing, it was plain that on the two Queens, above all, depended the issue.

The Cardinal de Ferrara had, as has been said, speedily acquired considerable influence over Catharine. That, however, was not enough. In the long run Catharine would be exactly what circumstances required. The real mistress of the situation was Jeanne. A time there was when she, like the Queen-Regent, would trim and tack and take the course that could be followed with most ease to herself. But Jeanne's old self was dead. Her health was failing. The old joyous outlook upon life had been darkened by misfortune. Blow after blow had fallen heavily upon her until all the old lightsome spirit had been quenched, and the sole idea that possessed her was to baffle those whom she conceived to be her enemies.

The Cardinal de Ferrara seems to have taken with precision the measure of the woman upon whom, at this juncture, the future of State and Church depended. She had been cruelly wronged, cruelly deceived. The Legate lavished on her every honour and compliment that could restore the self-esteem of a great lady who had suffered gross humiliation and salve her self-love. With Jeanne he was, as it were, a Huguenot in everything except faith.

During those days Jeanne was not often seen to smile ; it was an art she had forgotten. Once, however, the Legate surprised her into being amused. He

proposed a bargain that she had never thought to hear from such a quarter. His Eminence was prepared to listen to de Bèze preaching, if her Majesty would pay a similar compliment to St. Croix. Jeanne apparently relished the humour of the situation, for she could hardly have hoped that the Huguenot preacher would capture so famous a disciple as the Roman envoy. The latter accompanied the Queen of Navarre to Condé's apartments, where de Bèze delivered his discourse, and the Cardinal remained to the end.

Jeanne, however, was not to be won by such courtly attentions. Rome, to her, represented a political system which had eclipsed the glory of her House and made it the eternal sport of Fortune, as represented by the rulers of France and Spain. Apart altogether from the doctrinal contentions of the hour, she could not forget that Rome had given Spain authority to seize Upper Navarre from her grandsire. The Legate's diplomatic attentions, his concessions to her faith and prejudice, were in vain. Jeanne was not to be won, and her enemies recognised at length that the only way to rid themselves of her opposition was to crush her.

The velvet glove was thrown away, and on the lonely, harassed woman there rested the iron hand.

CHAPTER XII

JEANNE AND ANTOINE PART FOR EVER

IN this state of affairs into Antoine's ear was whispered the suggestion that he might, if he wished, repudiate his wife as a heretic or on some other trumped-up pretext, and that, once more free to woo, he might raise his fortune to an undreamt-of pitch of splendour by wedding Mary Stuart, the reigning Queen of Scots, who one day might occupy likewise the throne of England. On his side he was to be established in Navarre, enriched once more with the Spanish province which would be handed over to him as the reward of his exertions to extirpate heresy.

Antoine can have been no ordinary man to have heard unmoved such a proposal. Its baseness, its cruelty, its injustice roused to indignation no generous, no chivalrous emotion of his heart. Generosity and chivalry he had none, where there was nothing more to stir him than the misfortunes, the peril of his wife, the imminent ruin of his children. In his own narrow, selfish way the coxcomb doubtless loved Jeanne in the days when the competition for her hand lent a certain glamour to his suit, in the days, too, when the throne of Navarre was a height of

grandeur that flattered his vanity and satisfied his aspirations. But Antoine's love had not long survived possession. His affections soon wandered; and if it were possible, he would now gladly disown her, and fill the place of his broken and faded Queen with some such radiant beauty as Mary of Scotland or even a Louise de Rouet.

No sentiment of pity filled in his case the place of devotion to duty. If he could but gratify himself, let the woman suffer! No doubt he regarded it as folly that she should repine because of his desertion; regarded it doubtless as folly that anybody, man or woman, should subscribe to a code different from that which suited his own temperament and vices. But since fools there always would be, it was not for him to order his life in harmony with their eccentricities, wise man that he was! So he listened to the voice of the tempters, like the dupe that they knew him to be, all the while imagining himself a daring Prince playing for great stakes.

It was the Constable who had acted as mediator between the Duke of Guise and the King of Navarre. As the uncle of Mary of Scotland, Guise was, of course, the very man to possess authority for engaging in a secret treaty for disposing of her hand.

Of divorce, at all events, Jeanne need have had no fear. It is true that the circumstances of her marriage with the Duke of Cleves might have provided an excuse for bringing before the courts the question of the validity of her union with Antoine. But the whole affair had been considered long and carefully. The nullity of her previous marriage had

been established on the fullest, the most overwhelming evidence by irreproachable witnesses. But though the Queen need have had no anxiety as to the ultimate result, the cruelty and malignity of raising such an issue in the case of a woman, a mother, situated as she was, were none the less extreme.

Yet another lure was held out to Antoine to obtain his adhesion to the Guise faction. Communication was opened up between him and Philip of Spain; and in recompense for giving up the kingdom of Navarre, he was promised the sovereignty of the Island of Sardinia. To dazzle the unfortunate Antoine, it was described as a veritable paradise. Its rocks became grottoes of gold. Its surface was overspread with all the fruits and flowers of a luxuriant, tropical land! Its olive and orange and lemon groves, its vineyards and smiling fields, were tended by a brave and gifted people, now pining for the sceptre of a Prince who traced his proud descent from the Royal race of ancient France!

It was all superlative comedy for everybody except poor Jeanne. This hare-brained *petit maître*, whom she called husband, could be captured by any lure, however foolish, as though the one desire of his life was to wreck all that he had vowed to hold dear.

Catharine de' Medici noted with alarm that the Guises had outwitted her. Antoine was no longer her toy alone, to be played with as her interest dictated, to be employed in any service in which his great name could advance her cause. The toy had passed into other hands. The marionette-King now

responded to the wires manipulated by the party of Lorraine.

Catharine's success depended upon the finesse with which she played character against character, foible against foible. The Guises, in detaching so important a personage as the King of Navarre from her party, obliged her to readjust her forces, to evolve new dispositions, if she was to preserve her power.

In the altered circumstances it was inevitable that Jeanne should discover her for what she really was. In the opinion of the Queen of Navarre, the hour for action had arrived. If the Huguenots were ever to rule in France, action should be no longer delayed. But Catharine would not act. It was her policy to take no risks that could possibly be avoided. Jeanne, on the other hand, feared nothing, would yield nothing, would risk everything. The understanding between the two Queens was shaken to its foundation. And Jeanne, conscious that she had but been the instrument of the Florentine's convenience, deserted by all upon whom she had counted for victory, was utterly isolated at Court.

In her desolation her husband did not spare her feelings. To please his new-found friends, Guise, de Montmorency, St. André, he commanded her to go to Mass. The whole Court was to go to Mass—Catharine had issued an order to that effect. Jeanne, however, was not to be coerced. She declined to obey the new edict. Her husband had the temerity to try compulsion; and he was, it would seem, successful at least in preventing her from attending the services of her own ministers. But no threats could

induce her to conform to the faith of her childhood, the faith in which her mother had died.

Antoine, in wrath at her obstinacy, let fall from his lips some hint of the terrible treachery contemplated against her. He would divorce her!

Well may the hapless woman have been struck dumb with horror at this brutal revelation. Spain, France, princes, nobles, statesmen, courtiers—they were every one against her! And her husband too! What chance had she against them all! The long fight had wasted her strength. She was a doomed woman. Not for many years more could she continue the unequal struggle. And then, with such a father, what would be the fate of her children, what the fate of Navarre!

When Jeanne recovered her power of utterance, there was a scene of bitter recrimination.¹

“Is it Spain,” she said, “which has so unworthily enslaved Navarre, is it Rome, which has by a Bull sanctioned this great iniquity, that you ought to trust, rather than those faithful friends, rather than the wife who has never deceived you?” Would he trust the Guises, the fatal instruments of the ambition of both Rome and Spain, and his mortal enemies? Had he forgotten the dangers which he had to encounter in the time of Francis II.? If he was so generous as to think no more of these things, let him at least be so noble as to remember the bitter humiliations which she had had to suffer in silence!

Then she recalled to him the imminent peril in which Condé had stood at Orleans. He might, if

¹ Vauvilliers, “Hist. de Jeanne d’Albret.”

he wished, forget the dagger which Francis had held in his girdle, and which under the eyes of the Guises was to have pierced his heart. But could he forget that the brother, who had so courageously exposed his life in his service, would to a certainty have laid his head upon the block, but that fate cut off the young King before his uncles could accomplish his doom? Would he deliver this brother, who had escaped the scaffold by a miracle, to his enemies? Would he betray the valiant Chatillons who had embraced his cause to the cruel vengeance of their implacable persecutors?

“Would he, the King of Navarre, take the law from foreigners, when he should dictate it? . . . Would he permit himself to be effaced by those to whom he should speak as a master?” Sardinia! That enchanted isle! In bitter phrases Jeanne dwelt upon its chimerical delights. If it were all that it had been painted to him, why should Spain endow him with it in exchange for the rugged mountain-sides of Bearn! Since when had Spain become so generous? If generous she really was, why not return the provinces that had been torn from them more than a generation ago? With withering scorn, Jeanne may well have laughed as she reminded him that the perfidy of Spain was patent to all the world save him alone.

Was he harbouring the delusion, she demanded, that in taking sides with the Catholics, more powerful than the Huguenots, he was acquiring strength for his House? Fatal error! In their circumstances rank was nothing. Confidence was everything. The

Catholics would never trust a Bourbon who changed his faith for the third time, in preference to a Guise who had always remained staunch. Her last words were to remind him that if he followed the path which seemed to him so inviting, his name would go down to posterity sullied with the memory of a shameful defection.

All this had no effect upon Antoine beyond wounding his pride. His wife had spoken with literal truth the verdict which posterity would pronounce upon him. But to Antoine there was no wisdom save his own, and no other judgment of any value.

There was one avenue of appeal to his heart that she had as yet left untried. As to her fate he was indifferent. But what of their children? What of the gallant little Prince of Bearn, his mother's constant companion during those dark days—what of his sister Catharine?

"In consummating my ruin," she said, "know that you will consummate likewise the ruin of your children. . . . Your children! The offspring of a holy union recognised by men, blessed by God, the validity of which is contested by none save our enemies."¹

Antoine did not desire to bring dishonour on his children. Jeanne had at last touched a chord that met with some response even in his selfish heart.

He replied that she had better "by her prompt compliance with his wishes, and by her consequent reconciliation with the Courts of Rome and Spain, render that step unnecessary. As for himself, he was

¹ Vauvilliers, "Hist. de Jeanne d'Albret."

still undecided which religion was the true one ; but that while his uncertainty lasted, he was disposed to follow the faith of his fathers."

"If," replied Jeanne, "you entertain equal doubts on the subject of both religions, I beseech you to adopt the one likely to do you the smallest prejudice."

Antoine was despicable enough to go forth and report to his fellow-schemers the serious rupture that had taken place in his relations with his wife. Chantonnay immediately dispatched to Madrid news of Jeanne's fresh misfortune, which, in the circumstances, was intelligence as welcome as though disaster had overwhelmed her whole army. In her heart of hearts, Catharine de' Medici must have felt sorry for Jeanne. The Queen-Regent was not by nature cruel ; her faults were of another kind. And gladly would she have assuaged Jeanne's misfortunes, could she have done so without sacrificing her own interests. But she lived in a world where nobody would sacrifice anything that was held precious, and her Majesty least of all.

Catharine pointed out to Jeanne the risk she was running of losing her kingdom. If she did not care for herself, would she leave her son without a crown ? But Jeanne was now desperate. This Paris had driven her mad. It had robbed her of everything that could make her soft and yielding. She was now the warrior, and her reply was, "If I had my son and all the kingdoms of the world in my hand, I would throw them into the depths of the sea rather than imperil my salvation."

A little while before Jeanne had sent an ambassador to the Court of Rome to offer obedience. But obedience she would never offer again. She had now taken a resolution from which she would never depart. To her enemies she would give back blow for blow while life remained to her.

Jeanne had done with her husband. She had announced her intention of retiring to her own dominions and of leaving him to pursue as he pleased the course of his ambition and folly. She was tired of his threats. The atmosphere of deception and intrigue suffocated her. Let him divorce her, or try to do so, if he dared! Let him go to lord it over his enchanted Isle of Sardinia if he could charter a ship to carry him thither and find a port to harbour his barque! He was a poltroon. She desired to see him no more.

Antoine apparently consented to her departure, for at this time the Legate wrote to Rome :

“The King of Navarre, on purpose to give me a certain proof that his dispositions are good respecting religion, told me a few days ago that he designed to send the Queen his wife home to Bearn, under the plea that affairs required her presence there ; and that she had testified to him her willingness to depart. However, since then things have changed their aspect and she does not yet go, whether on account of the rigour of the season or her own failing health, I know not. The King [of Navarre], nevertheless, is very firmly resolved to send her back early in the spring ; for my part, I shall not fail, you may feel assured, to

contribute with all my power to the achievement of either of these designs." ¹

From day to day the weary conflict between husband and wife proceeded. The chasm between them grew wider and wider. Then at length Antoine, tired of her importunities, allowed her to leave St. Germain for Paris, where she once more took up her abode at the Hôtel de Condé. A little later the Court also moved to the capital.

Still Jeanne did not set out on her long journey southwards. Doubtless some spark of affection for Antoine still smouldered in her heart. She had come thither to rescue him from the toils of Louise, and was loath to depart baffled, loath to make a surrender that in the depths of her soul would be, she well knew, a surrender for ever.

But at Paris things did not mend for the unhappy woman; on the contrary, they went from bad to worse. Antoine, more heartless, more masterful than ever, would make her go to Mass against her will. Jeanne, rendered more resolute by persecution, would die first. And one day the little Prince of Bearn, now a boy of ten, stood up boldly in defence of his mother against his father's violence. The youngster's gallantry, instead of recalling Antoine to his better self, instead of fanning to life whatever spark of manliness and chivalry remained to him, had the effect of enraging him. Young Henry was rewarded for his courage with soundly boxed ears, and was handed over to his sub-preceptor for further chastisement.

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

So completely cast down was Jeanne by her husband's cruelty, that Catharine appealed to her to yield an appearance of obedience. The fight was fast undermining her health. But Jeanne, unhappily, was of the breed that never yields. Catharine warned her that her son's future was at stake. If she would preserve for him the heritage of his ancestors, it was necessary that she should be reconciled to her enemies. Even her devotion to her son could not, however, shake Jeanne's steadfast purpose. She who had of old counselled Antoine to patronise the religion that was most expedient, would now go to the block before yielding anything to anybody. All the sweetest delights of home and love were lost to her beyond redemption. Everything most fondly cherished by a woman, not the less because she was a queen, had been stolen from her. But it was no ordinary woman who had thus been plundered. Fighting to the death, half Europe should feel the shock of her fall.

Meanwhile Paris was in a ferment. The extreme partisans were steadily getting beyond control. The defection of Antoine had placed the Huguenots in a desperate position which could only be improved by desperate measures. Condé, Coligny, d'Andelot, Chatillon, were ready for anything, ready even to draw the sword. But so too were Guise and Montmorency and St. André, and behind these were not only all the organised forces of the kingdom and the sympathies of the great majority of the people, but all the resources and influence of Spain and Rome.

While Guise was coming up to Paris from the

country, an incident occurred which to those with eyes to read the signs of the times might have been interpreted as an omen of unimaginable horrors to come.

Some six months before a Huguenot chapel had been opened at Vassy and was attended by some eight or nine hundred persons. Antoinette de Bourbon, mother of the Guises, regarded it as a personal affront that the heretics should worship, as it were, under the very walls of her Château of Joinville, and often begged her son to deliver her from the infliction.¹ As the Duke of Guise now approached Vassy, he heard the sound of bells—as it happened, dead-bells!

The great man asked the meaning of the tolling, and was informed that it was to summon the Huguenots to prayer.

The Duke, gnawing his beard—certain sign of his wrath—swore a terrible oath that soon their prayer would be of another kind.

Some of the Guise's party, evidently taking their cue from their master's temper, went on ahead and entered the Huguenot meeting-house. They were invited to be seated, but those who so addressed them can hardly have been innocent of the hostile character of the intruders. There were hot words and the Guisards were expelled.

But not tamely would they submit to such treatment. It was of no moment, either to the Duke or to his followers, that the Huguenots had been disturbed in their own chapel. The doors were now

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

barricaded, while the congregation tried to defend the place as well as they could. But defence was impossible against the whole force of Guise now without the walls. The place was carried by assault, sixty persons being slain and many more wounded. A blood-red signal for civil war had been given to the whole land.

Guise entered Paris at the head of a little army ; and against him who led an army, justice could only be obtained by force of arms ! From Guise, however, there was no chief to exact reparation for the mourning wrought by him beneath the shadow of Joinville. The King was helpless, so was the Queen-Regent. For the latter to raise a hand against Guise would have meant her ruin, while the young King would certainly have been seized by the Triumvirate and kept in leading-strings, a puppet-ruler, whose throne would topple to the dust if he failed in obedience.

The factions were now almost at the parting of the ways. Jeanne realised to the full the great importance of being able to enjoy the countenance of the King. She appealed to Catharine therefore to put herself under Condé's protection and to fly to Orleans. Presumably she intended that the young King should accompany his mother.

Catharine, however, would seem to have penetrated the future more accurately than Jeanne. The Huguenots could not win in the end. They were only a handful of the nation. They drew their strength, such as it was, from ephemeral causes, partly political, partly religious. When these causes had passed, the Huguenots would not be the triumphant party.

To Jeanne's prayer she therefore turned a deaf ear. In Paris she would remain. Paris was overwhelmingly hostile to the Huguenots, and Paris was France—always had been France.

But though the Queen-Regent would not fly, she was not safe in the capital. Since the death of her husband she had had abundant opportunities for revealing her true character. Her struggle for power was now proceeding in the midst of men who knew her thoroughly, and, knowing her, did not trust her, were indeed a little afraid of her. She brought to the great game advantages which none of those who surrounded her enjoyed. She was an Italian. She had no hereditary prejudices, no family associations which hampered her. Whatever party, whatever individuals were in the ascendant, to her subtle, self-confident, self-sufficient nature it hardly mattered, so long as she reigned supreme. Catholic and Huguenot were, to all outward seeming, very nearly alike to her, so long as Catharine de' Medici was Queen-Regent.

Once a fright was given her that would have driven a woman less richly endowed with courage and resource to adopt Jeanne's advice and fly to Orleans. True to her policy of discovering the secrets of all who were associated with her in the Government, she caused a tube to be introduced between the wall and the arras-hangings of the apartment where the Triumvirate assembled, that she might hear all that passed.¹ The discussion she was thus privileged to overhear was full of political interest for

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

her, full of political chances too. But that was nothing. . . . Then St. André spoke. The bluff marshal's was a startling note. His was the true sixteenth-century solution of the problem engaging them. The Queen-Regent!—she was in the way, always in the way. They could never dare to trust her. They could never make her a good French-woman. The safest place for her was the bottom of the Seine. Seize her! Seal her up in a bag! Put her in the river, where she would be at rest, leaving them some peace!

Poor Catharine! She had indeed heard something to reward her for all her pains. It has been suggested that the Triumvirate were not unconscious that the Queen was within earshot, and that St. André's proposal was but a soldier's jest, intended to frighten one who had been at some pains, and taken some risk, to share in secrets that were not intended for her ears. Whatever St. André's motive, the Queen-Regent had the satisfaction of hearing his colleagues dissent from his proposal. Catharine, however, resolved to put some distance between herself and the river. After that suffocating hint of a bag in the Seine, the air of the country would revive her spirits. Taking the King with her, she retired to Fontainebleau.

Paris was indeed fast becoming too hot to hold any one who did not agree with the ruling faction. Condé and Coligny also wisely decided to exchange the air of the capital for the more congenial atmosphere of the provinces, and marched away to Orleans.

Jeanne was now alone. The person in all France

most dangerous to the Government was in their stronghold. What would they do with her?

The Triumvirate thought of seizing her and holding her a prisoner. If this idea was not acted upon, the credit was hardly due to Antoine. Utterly unbalanced by the delusive promises held out to him by the intriguers who surrounded him, the King of Navarre was now his consort's sworn enemy. That she was allowed to enjoy her freedom was probably due to fears lest any attempt against her should lead to a popular uprising. The Huguenots of Paris would have died to a man to save her; and many an honest gentleman, faithful to Rome, would have drawn his sword to protect a woman whose husband had shown himself an ineffable poltroon. In despair, however, at her desolate plight, hopeless of winning back her husband to her allegiance, Jeanne resolved to quit the capital while it was yet possible to do so, and seek an asylum in her own dominions.

She had come to Paris, above all, to rescue Antoine from the toils of Louise. Now, with heart sealed for ever against him, sealed too, alas! to every warm and tender emotion, she applied for permission to leave the capital. She would surrender her worthless lord to his worthless enchantress; and, transformed with grief and disappointment, her nature utterly warped and embittered, without fear and without hope she would go out and tread her lonely, rugged path to the grave, already half open to receive her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEATH-BED OF L'ÉCHANGEUR

“VOILÀ, Monseigneur, un acte digne de vous !
Dieu vous donne bonne vie, et longue !”

The speaker was the Cardinal de Lorraine ; “Monseigneur” was the King of Navarre. The act which had elicited such effusive gratitude was, it is said, the acquiescence of Antoine in a design to arrest Jeanne forthwith. The most dangerous, the most determined, the most powerful Huguenot in the kingdom would be safest in the impenetrable seclusion of the Bastille. With her Majesty under lock and key, the problem of governing France would be freed from its most baffling factor. Coligny, Condé, and the rest were stout fighters with a stern following ; but generals and soldiers, they were all merely subjects of France, who, if the worst came to the worst, and they took the field, should do so as rebels against the King, and as rebels should risk an ignoble fate and the ruin of all they held dear. Not so Jeanne. She was a Queen whose sovereignty was no shadow. With her as their leader, the Huguenots had behind them the resources of a State which, though poor and weak and divided, was yet devoted

to its Royal House; and in support of it would send to the field some of the boldest fighting-men to be found in Europe.

In her loneliness and isolation, beset with a thousand perils that she could only vaguely guess at, Jeanne longed to have near her some of her own people, men with no diplomacy but with brave hearts and ready swords, whose words meant what they said, and whose deeds would be as plain to friend, to foe. She therefore wrote the following letter to her countryman, the Vicomte de Gourdon :

“ MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE,—

“ During the early days of this reign, perceiving that Madame the Queen-Mother, and Monsieur the King of Navarre, my husband, continued in peace and concord to discharge the affairs of the regency, and that they not only put a stop to the tortures and executions for heresy, but even granted liberty of conscience, with leave to erect churches outside the towns, and within all castles and *fiefs de haubert*, such as yours, after mature thought I came to the conclusion that from henceforth all things might progress to a happy end.

“ Since which, however, the King of Navarre, hungering after the seductive flatteries of several fair damsels, dexterous and versed in toils for inspiring love, of whom the said Queen avails herself to accomplish and perfect her secret designs, the said King of Navarre, I repeat, has become so deluded and enervated, both mentally and bodily, by indolence and luxury, that he has permitted the Guises, assisted

by the Constable, to regain the upper hand, to his great shame and the public calamity.

"Besides which, the said Triumvirate has traitorously and unworthily assailed the Prince of Condé; while the said King of Navarre is become so stultified by the trickery and false promises of Rome made through the Queen-Mother, to give us restitution of our Kingdom, iniquitously retained by the Spaniards, and by his fear of losing what still remains to us, that he will neither say nor do anything, nor yet permit me.

"My heart feels heavy and sorrowful when I contemplate all that is concocting here in so sinister a manner; and when I see this said Triumvirate oppose the Princes and the peace of the Realm, and purpose to sow tares with discord throughout the Kingdom—as all here who are expert, and advised in modes of good government, acknowledge; amongst whom I name the Archbishop of Vienne, the Bishops of Valence and Oleron, the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, and other sage personages not misled and distracted by vice, avarice, and ignorance.

"Amidst all this woe, my soul, sad and perplexed, yearns to be counselled and consoled by a loyal friend.

"Come, then, to me here, or at least write me word what it appears to you that I ought to do, and I will try to conform to your opinion. . . .

"Since the unexpected skirmish which occurred at Vassy, through the said Duke of Guise, the Prince of Condé has courageously manifested himself as becomes the champion of reform, and the

declared enemy of the said Triumvirate; although the King of Navarre, his brother, has most unnaturally placed himself at its head. . . ."¹

Gourdon wrote in reply as a man who shrank from extreme measures, and feared therefore that his counsel must prove unpalatable to a woman whose plight was well-nigh desperate.

"In respect to the measures," he wrote, "which it appears to me that your Majesty should adopt on this present emergency, it is my advice, that, being tied to a husband, and living under his authority, and being at the same time despoiled of your kingdom, but having present hope of its final restitution, your Majesty should neither act, nor undertake anything whatever, against the will of your said husband, in the matter of religion. Every one is convinced that your Majesty—a most enlightened Princess, and virtuously firm in well-doing—follows the reformed opinions. Such being the fact, it is needless to furnish your enemies with subject and cause for declaration and controversy as heretofore."

At last Jeanne concluded that she dare no longer remain in Paris. Not a single Huguenot chief still lingered in the capital: they were all at Orleans. While Catharine was near, Jeanne had not felt altogether alone. Despite the most contrary dispositions, the impression left by the sum-total of events is that Catharine had a genuine regard for Jeanne, and that the latter realised this and never at any time

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

apprehended personal anger from the Queen-Regent. But now Catharine herself was no longer safe in Paris. War was in the air; it was a place for soldiers only. Jeanne would follow Catharine's example and fly too.

Some whisper of the intentions of the Triumvirate had doubtless reached her. They had indeed become the talk of Paris; and through fear rather than from worthier motives the Queen of Navarre was suffered to depart.

It was arranged, however, that she should be arrested at Vendôme, where she would rest on her long journey southwards. Leaving the young Prince of Bearn behind, Jeanne, accompanied by little Catharine and escorted by a large company of horsemen, rode out of Paris. This was the beginning of April. On the 14th of May 1562 the Queen and her retinue entered Vendôme, and the gates of her husband's château were thrown open wide to receive her.

Here Queen Jeanne should have been safe, if safety there was for her anywhere within the frontiers of France. This was the château of the head of the Bourbons, and feudal and patriarchal ties bound its inmates to her consort and through him to his Queen. But this stronghold of her family was now to become her prison. Her husband's vassals were to become her gaolers, and when the gates closed behind her and her cavaliers, he who held the keys may well have wondered grimly when he should see the Huguenot squadron take the road again, and where would then be their Royal mistress?

But in every camp there were traitors, in every household spies. And when Jeanne rode into the Château of Vendôme, receiving the obsequious salutes of her husband's retainers, the tragedy and humour of the situation were not altogether a secret from her. The rattling of the keys had a grim significance, but not for her alone. She had learned, perhaps had guessed, what sort of hospitality she might expect there, and had laid her plans on a scale of due appreciation.

At the château all was well! The Queen was safe there! The authorities of Vendôme had but a simple duty to perform! When the time came for her to depart, they would beg her to remain. Then they would close the gates, and, she being a woman of ready understanding, they would need to say no more.

But alas for the guileless folk of Vendôme! While Jeanne lay at the château, they carried to her tidings that a party of cavalry, some four hundred strong, were approaching the town. Antoine had sent his commands as to what they were to do with Jeanne, but he had given them no guidance as to how bodies of flying cavalry were to be entertained. Unwilling to oppose the horsemen, and just as unwilling to welcome them, their uncertainty was relieved by their august prisoner, for Jeanne herself gave orders that the strange warriors were to be made welcome.

Vendôme obeyed, and bitterly did the town regret its obedience. The newcomers proved to be a body of mercenary troops in the pay of the Huguenots.

These mercenaries were men of the most abandoned character, to whom warfare was a profession, murder one of its recreations, pillage the proper reward of soldiers of fortune. The proceedings of these vandals at Vendôme are thus summarised in a letter to Philip of Spain, the Queen of Navarre being alluded to as "Madame de Vendôme."

"Whilst Madame de Vendôme was sojourning in Vendôme," wrote the ambassador, Chantonnay, to his Royal master, "a body of four hundred horsemen made a descent on that town. Madame de Vendôme forbade any one to oppose them, saying 'that she would not have them harassed; but that she herself would so control them, that they should commit no ravages.' Nevertheless, as soon as these lawless marauders entered the town, they desecrated the churches, and especially the monastery where that sacred relic the Holy Tear is deposited, and drove away the priests and monks. After having pillaged everything they could lay their hands upon, they took their departure. I believe, however, that this enterprise was executed without the sanction and knowledge of the said Dame de Vendôme."

Amidst the devastation wrought by these roving freebooters, all thought of holding Jeanne by force was abandoned. She therefore departed on her way. But meanwhile Marshal de Montluc, commanding the Royal forces in the territory adjoining Navarre, received orders to intercept her.

Jeanne was now a fugitive, with a whole army bent upon effecting her capture. Had the strength and

energy of earlier days been hers, she would have made one tireless dash to the Pyrenees. But her health was rapidly declining. She had been ill at Vendôme, and, but for the danger that threatened her, she would still have been lying there. But though danger had forced her to take to the road, she could only travel by easy stages, and often it seemed doubtful whether the advance could be continued at all.

At Caumont she was obliged to take to her bed. The warrior-Queen was engaged in a battle in which she was already half vanquished. And her enemy was consumption of the lungs. Its vice-like grasp was upon her, never to be shaken off. How indeed could it be, when the hapless invalid, to whom rest and quietude were everything, had ever in her ears the clash of arms, when every day and every night brought her fresh alarms, when in her heart a wound was festering that no balm of earth could heal!

Welcome to the weary woman was the brief rest she found at friendly Caumont. Then came the inevitable alarm. Montluc, the terrible Montluc, one of the most merciless profligates in the army of the King, was advancing on Caumont. To horse!—to horse! From her bed up rose the sick woman. It was the penalty of being a Queen. And away she rode as swiftly as she could to the banks of the Garonne. Far ahead of her, mounted on the fleetest steed that Caumont could find for so chivalrous a service, rode a courier whose duty it was to warn the Bearnois of the peril that beset their sovereign lady.

The courier apprised the Baron Audaux of Jeanne's danger, and instantly, with eight hundred men, he rode forth to the rendezvous. Just in time the gallant Bearnois appeared on the horizon. Montluc, with some flying horsemen, was already on her heels. But Audaux and his merry men were not to be lightly challenged by a weaker force. Here was their Royal lady back from Paris at the gallop! And in wild pursuit the troops of the King! This was hospitality indeed! Happy days had dawned for France when thus a daughter of its Royal House was driven over its frontiers.

Like wildfire the news flew through Bearn. The Queen's misfortunes and dangers raised loyalty to fever pitch, and as she re-entered once more her own land, the people received her everywhere with frantic enthusiasm.

For more than twenty years Bearn had been an asylum for Huguenot refugees. Her mother had been their patron. Antoine, too, had encouraged them when his fancy had leaned towards their faith. Jeanne herself, but with more discretion, had been their friend. The people generally had, however, remained staunch to their allegiance to the faith of their fathers. But now everything was to be changed. The season of discretion was at an end; the era of extremes had begun.

It is difficult to understand the frame of mind in which Jeanne now acted. Not content with granting complete toleration to the Huguenots, she adopted the most tyrannical methods of suppressing the religion of Rome. This policy was an invitation to utter ruin.

Wedge between France and Spain, the destruction of her House was assured, unless the Huguenots triumphed in France, and triumphed in sufficient strength to protect her against the legions of the Spanish King.

One of her loyal nobles must have voiced the opinion held amongst most of his peers when he warned the Queen that it would be prudent of her to follow the example of France in matters of religion.

"As to the King of France," said Jeanne, "I am a Queen also!"

"What comparison is there, Madame? I would leap over your kingdom in a bound!"

"Well," replied Jeanne, "get out of it immediately!"¹

Her quick retort was the only vengeance which she exacted for the wound that had been inflicted on her pride.

Events in Bearn infused new heart into the Huguenots of the neighbouring country, and soon Guienne and Gascony were in a state of anarchy. Jeanne appealed to the Government in Paris to protect the Huguenots in the enjoyment of the liberty that had been extended to them by the edict of January. Her protégés, however, without waiting for the intervention of the Government, swarmed over the country, breaking images and plundering churches of their ornaments and sacred vessels.

The Triumvirate had by this time realised the grave error they had made in allowing Jeanne to pass

¹ Vauvilliers, "Hist. de Jeanne d'Albret."

beyond their control. The circumstances of her dramatic escape from Vendôme, of her rescue from the very arms of Montluc, had set Huguenot blood on fire. Half-smitten with panic, Catharine cast round for some method of retrieving the blunder that had been committed. She therefore wrote to Jeanne inviting her to use her influence with Condé to induce him to withdraw from warlike operations and behave as a loyal and peaceable subject to the King, her son. Jeanne's reply was as follows :

“MADAME,—

“It has pleased your Majesty to write to me . . . desiring me to counsel the Prince my brother to lay down his arms. I hold, Madame, little communication with the said Prince ; and, moreover, as on reflection it appeared to me that it would be unbecoming on my part to offer advice to so many personages of more competent understanding than myself, you will be pleased, Madame, to hold me excused, if I have not done more in this affair than to commission a cavalier, who was about to join the standard of the said Prince, to inform him of that which it has pleased you to command me. To this message, Madame, the Prince has returned me such an answer, that it seemed to me that he has no other desire than to serve and obey you in all things. I assure you, Madame, that I lament deeply, as any loyal subject of the King can do, the unhappy differences in which you are involved. I will even confess to you that I should dread to behold their effect upon your health, were it not that

I believe that the continual prayer which is made for you will be granted by our gracious God.”¹

Jeanne then went on to beg from Catharine the fulfilment of a promise that she had made in happier days. Catharine had promised that Jeanne's friend, the Baron Audaux, should be given the post of Gentleman of the Chamber in the Royal Household.

“ Nevertheless, Madame,” she proceeded, “ another has been recently nominated to the office ; and your promise, upon which I steadily relied, remains unfulfilled. I entreat you very humbly, Madame, to recall your promise and to fulfil it ; failing the which, you will cause me to receive the most cruel vexation, as I have spoken assuredly, and even boastingly, to others of my credit with you in this matter, which, it seems, that I have forfeited only because I felt reluctant to importune you earlier on the subject. I entreat you, therefore, Madame, not to allow those to triumph who would rejoice in proclaiming the little influence which I possess with your Majesty. The messenger which I send with this, if it pleases you to hear him, will tell you how the matter stands, and the remedy which I propose.”

Deeply angered as Jeanne was with her husband, she did not omit in this letter to commend him to the care of Catharine. She could not forget him, though he deserved forgetfulness. Gone for ever from her sight, indifferent to her though he was, his careless fingers still held in some way the strings of her heart.

¹ Freer's "Life."

Meanwhile, Antoine sent Boulogne, his secretary, to Bearn with instructions to apply to the sovereign Council at Pau to undo what had been done by Jeanne. In Bearn, however, there was no edict of January. Jeanne's will was the supreme law. It was unfortunate for herself that it should be so, for, driven to desperation, bent upon giving back to her enemies blow for blow, she waged ruthless war upon those of her own people who remained faithful to the Church that had been theirs for long centuries.

Boulogne was given no opportunity of intriguing against her. The moment he set foot in Bearn he was arrested and put into prison.

"I surrendered," she said, "the power that God gave me over my subjects, to my husband, because of the obedience that God commanded me to pay to him. But when I saw him diverting it from the glory of God and the good of my people, I reasserted my rights."¹

While Jeanne was thus announcing that she had, as it were, deposed Antoine from the throne which she had allowed him to share with her in Bearn, her faithless consort had taken the field, accompanied by Louise de Rouet, whom he would dazzle with his feats of arms.

The army of the King of France was nominally commanded by Antoine. But the real chief was a man of different mettle from Louise de Rouet's doting companion. This was the Duke of Guise. The Constable de Montmorency was also in the field.

¹ Vauvilliers, "Hist. de Jeanne d'Albret."

The Royal army laid siege to Rouen, which was valiantly defended by the Huguenots. Antoine had his quarters in the village of Darnetal, quite close to the suburb of St. Hilaire. In this quarter the hottest fighting of the siege took place, fighting in which the women of the town sometimes acquitted themselves as Amazons.

But though hot fighting took place during the siege, there were gay doings in the Royal camp. Under such a generalissimo it could not well be otherwise. To lend spirit and vivacity to the enterprise, the Queen-Regent with her dazzling corps of maids-of-honour came thither. Amongst her Majesty's ladies was one who was afterwards to earn a place in history by the same devious means which had already made Louise de Rouet a person of so much importance in the camp of the besieging army. This beautiful girl, Isabelle de Limeul, who belonged to one of the noblest houses in the kingdom, was destined later to win the heart of Antoine's brother, Louis de Condé, and in doing so, to condemn his wife in shame and sorrow to her grave.

To Antoine the battlefield was but a new diversion. Accustomed from boyhood to its perils, he had hitherto borne a charmed life. But no charm endures for ever. One day in the trenches a bullet passed by his comrades, to find its billet in the King of Navarre. They carried Antoine to his quarters. The surgeons gathered round him, and essayed to extract the ball. The wound was not in itself mortal, but Antoine's restless spirit made it so. When the town was taken by assault, nothing would do him



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after an anonymous drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale

CATHARINE DE' MEDICI IN 1561

but to be borne in a litter through the breach into the town, with trumpeters sounding a fanfare before him. The wounded King gave himself up as eagerly as the youngest subaltern to the intoxication of victory. He had not long to wait for the penalty of his revels. Inflammation set up in the wound ; he was smitten with a high fever ; and soon the hero who had entered Rouen to the music of heralds was lying at death's door.

As his last hours approached, his mind turned once more to the austere Queen in the Pyrenees against whom he had so grievously sinned. His last message to her was one of affectionate remembrance, and to beg her to care for their children.

Then it was time to think of his soul. Antoine l'Échangeur, as they called the man who could not be true to any faith, had now to make his final choice. Catholic priests were at hand. He confessed his sins. The Holy Viaticum was placed upon his parched tongue. . . .

But Antoine was not yet dead. The Bishop of Mende had performed for him the last Catholic rites. A Huguenot zealot was, however, at hand, and when occasion served he read to Antoine the Scriptures ; and Antoine, it is said, declared that, if he recovered, he would have the "pure gospel" preached throughout France.

Then turning to his brother, the Cardinal de Bourbon, he declared that he wished to live and die in the Confession of Augsburg.

La Mézières, the Huguenot who had taken the place of the Bishop of Mende, then continued his

reading. When he came to that portion of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians in which the apostle inculcates the duty of submission and obedience in wives towards their husbands, Antoine interrupted the reader.

"You see," he said, "God wishes wives to obey their husbands."

"It is true, Sire," replied Mézières; "but the Scriptures also say, 'Husbands, love your wives.'"

This allusion to the disorders of his life stirred the dying man to a flash of repartee that recalled the old genial days at the Louvre, when he was the young lion of the Court, and Jeanne d'Albret was proud to be his choice against all the princes and nobles from near and far that thronged its gorgeous salons.

"For twenty-six years," he said, "you have served me; and it is only now you discover the folly of my life. . . . It is plain I am indeed to die!"

When he had made his will, though he had grown weaker, the fancy seized him to be carried by the river to St. Maur-les-Fossés, on the environs of Paris. But this whim of one whose life was one round of whims and fancies and vain vagaries was not to be realised. On the 17th of November the boat which carried him up the Seine towards his beloved Paris was steered towards the shore.

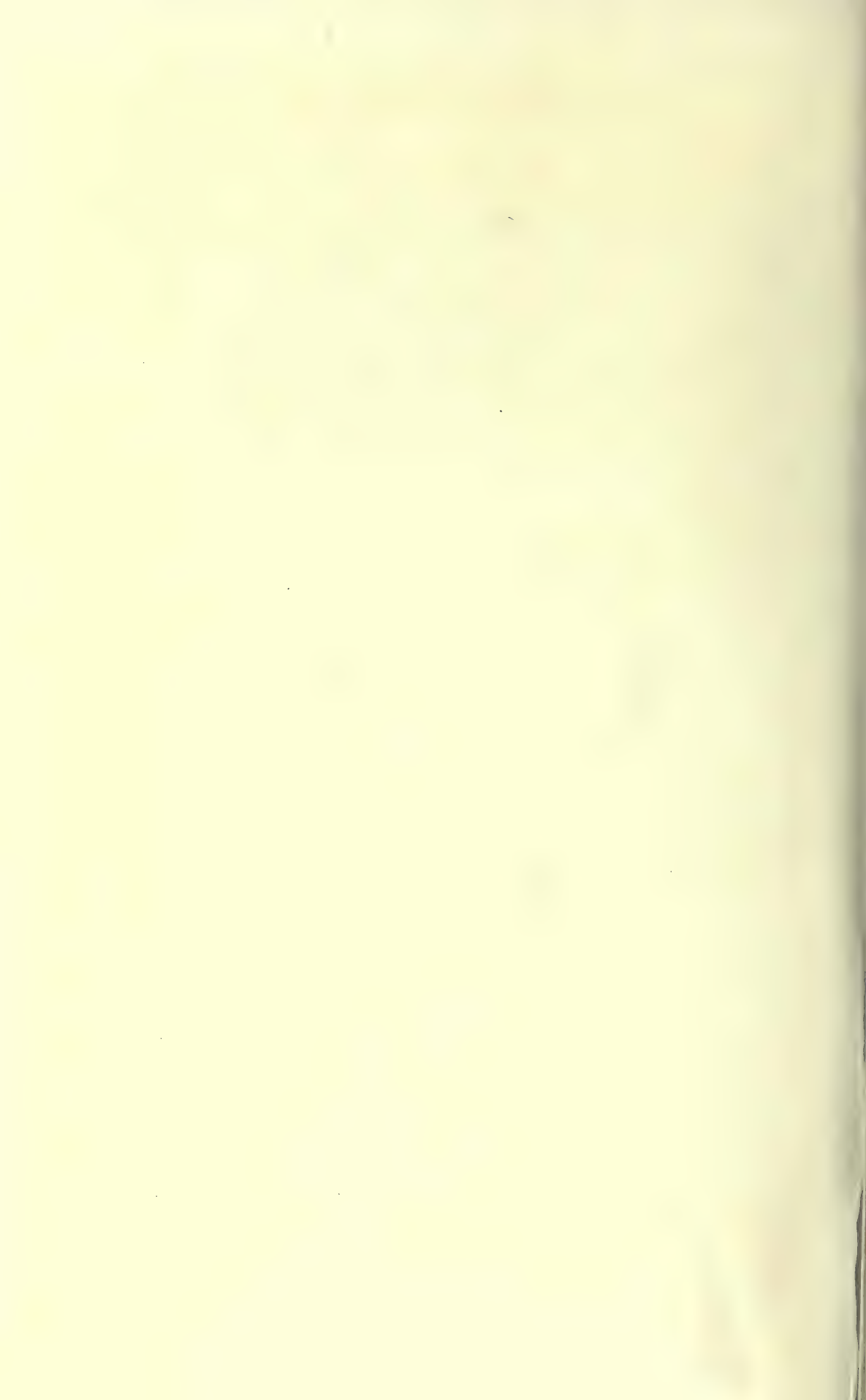
The King of Navarre was in his last agony.

Dreadful convulsions seized him, and in a little while the last moments of his wasted life had been lived, and Antoine de Bourbon, far from home and wife and children, lay a dead man upon the shores



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Clouet

ANTOINE DE BOURBON, KING OF NAVARRE (1547)



of the ancient river by whose waters he had passed the best days of his careless years.

His last words were murmured to an Italian valet.

“Serve my son well. . . . Let him serve well the King.”

And that was all. L'Échangeur would change no more. The tragedy of his misspent life would not finish while still Jeanne lived. But as he closed his eyes, a comedy that for years had diverted France had reached its dismal end.

Antoine dead was no longer of much consequence. The time was one in which the living, in hot pursuit of place and power, could waste no precious hours by the bier of a kinsman. The Cardinal de Bourbon had been near his brother to the last, and had taken what measures he could for his soul. But when Antoine had ceased to breathe, he hastened away to Court to report what had occurred, and to play his part as a Prince of the Blood in the new re-adjustment of offices.

Some weeks later the casket containing the mortal remains of Antoine was carried into the Cathedral Church of Vendôme for the last obsequies. Only a little while before, the mandate had gone forth that his wife was to be kept a prisoner in the town. But Providence had ordered it otherwise. The lady had departed; and here was her lord come to fulfil in some wise his own decree respecting her, come to enter into the dark prison where, in the tomb of his ancestors, he should take his rest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST OF FRANÇOIS DE GUISE

SO notorious had been the reputation of Antoine for gallantry that it was commonly said of him :

“ Pour t'assurer de ce Prince assure-toi de sa dame.”

But not for many a year had the lady been his wife. Whatever of bitterness, however, had rankled in Jeanne's heart when the length of France divided her from her husband, now that the gulf of eternity lay between them, his sins were forgotten or laid at the doors of those whom she thought had tempted him from her. And, like one who had lost a real lord and protector, she retired to the Château of Orthez, there to observe in retirement the mourning imposed by fashion on the devoted widow.

At Orthez letters of condolence reached her from many quarters ; but perhaps a stranger epistle never reached a mourner than the following :

“ MADAME,—

“ Doubtless the evil which has befallen you is great, the grief just, the loss irreparable.

“ To be severed from one's better half, to be

separated from one's head, from one's own flesh and blood—is there not enough in this to afflict, and to fear? Yes, truly; nor can there be heart so hard as not to melt at so grievous a loss; so that I would even that my tears might mingle with your own, and fall together on the sepulchre of your deceased King, that we might give evidence of our grief and relieve the emotion inherent to flesh and blood on so doleful an occasion.

“But what of this body, which is given for a life short and calamitous?”

“What regret ought we to feel for the loss of a thing which brings us nothing but sorrow and disappointment, and which hinders us often from gathering the fruit of a more holy life? Let all of us, therefore, that be married, live as though we were not! Let us not, even in thought, attach to corruptible flesh the divine image and semblance in which we were created; let us detach the spirit from that gross and material substance; so that, despite the body and its belongings, we may take possession of the things to come, over which death has no power.

“You will then, Madame, perceive, while thinking to have lost the King, your spouse, that you will enjoy his society a hundredfold more than if he were living with you. For who will now prevent you from speaking to him, reasoning with him, and conversing with him as long as you please, without that Monsieur and Madame may come to whisper in his ear, to pull him by the robe, to divert his attention from you? It is now, Madame, that he will explain to you the reason of his long absence, of his change of life, and of his

other affairs. It is now, Madame, if he has committed any fault in respect to yourself, that he will confess it, making you all his satisfaction that the regard between you requires. In short, Madame, it seems to me that the body cannot prevent you from having pleasure in his presence; seeing that his spirit of delusion, being also cast aside (with the flesh), he will for ever be united to you: the which ought to be greatly consoling, for God has left his spirit free, so that you may commune together often as it may please you.

“If you receive and heartily accept this belief, I shall esteem you happy, and myself also, Madame, if I have the felicity of remaining your Majesty’s very humble and very obedient servant,

“CHARLOTTE DE ROYE.”¹

The writer of this extraordinary letter was the Countess of Rochefoucauld, a sister of the Princess of Condé, a lady of great piety who would seem to have learned from the experience of her friends and kindred that husbands are apt to be a greater comfort in the spirit than in the flesh; and that resignation requires less effort when the embrace to whom the loved one has flown is the embrace of the grave.

While Jeanne languished in retirement at Orthez, the tide of misery that deluged France did not subside.

Now that Antoine was gone, the new chief of the House of Bourbon was, of course, her son, the young Prince of Bearn, who, still a mere child, was spared

¹ Freer, “Life of Jeanne d’Albret.”

for a little time the obligation of taking the field in this strife of brother against brother. The fighting chief of the House was therefore the Prince of Condé. And to the camp of the Huguenots had consequently been transferred whatever of glamour the name of Antoine had imparted to the King's army.

The Huguenots were now masters of Orleans, Blois, Bourges, Poitiers, Rochelle, Agen, Montpellier, Lyons, Dieppe, and a dozen other places, all of more or less importance, while Rouen had, as has been seen, been recovered for the King only after heavy fighting in which the nominal commander-in-chief had lost his life.

All France was on fire; and as if it were not enough for Frenchmen to ravage France, the riff-raff of Europe was recruited under either banner. Italians, Spaniards, Germans, cut-throats without heart or principle or religion, the attraction for them was pillage, violation, massacre. Up and down the land they marched, leaving behind them ashes, dishonour, tears, and death. Only a degree less terrible than the mercenaries were the native troops. To destroy the beautiful was the mission, the religion of the Huguenots. Everything precious, everything embellished with the genius of great masters, was given up to rapine. Even the tombs of the dead were torn open and their dust scattered to the winds.

In ferocity, in barbarity, in indifference to suffering Catholic and Huguenot, Huguenot and Catholic, there was, however, little to choose between them. Human life was nothing. Mercy was a quality undreamt of. To strike terror to the hearts of the

enemy was the only excuse deemed necessary for causing blood to flow in one unceasing stream.

In attracting to their colours the arms of mercenaries, the Huguenots enjoyed far greater advantages than the enemy. The cathedrals, the shrines, the convents and monasteries, to be found in thousands all over France, were endowed with untold wealth, the benefactions of countless generations of the faithful. All this illimitable store of riches was now at the mercy of any marauders strong enough and impious enough to invade the sanctuary. Plunder was not only a means of keeping the fierce levies loyal; it was also a well-recognised method of replenishing the paymaster's treasury.

According to a chronicler who was himself a soldier and courtier of the period, "there were now more millions of gold in France than there were formerly silver"; and the same writer adds:¹ "France was never before so rich nor so miserable." At Limoux a mother offered money to save her child's honour from the soldiery fighting to establish the reign of love and justice and truth! But alas for the perversity of men's ways! the vandals took the wretched mother's purse and robbed the hapless household of the treasure of its daughter's honour as well! But the infamies perpetrated were as various as men's passions, as the demons of the inferno let loose on earth could make them. The bloodthirsty Montluc declared that one man hanged was worth a hundred killed in battle. When such was the faith of a great Marshal of France, one can almost believe

¹ Brantôme.

it to be true, as related, that a common soldier tore the liver from a living child, and with the blood-lust of some wild thing of the desert devoured the palpitating flesh!

France was given over to such horrors as have perhaps never been surpassed—even in France! If it were given to Kings and Queens to weep tears of blood, the Louvre in those days should assuredly have beheld scenes to storm high Heaven and melt to pity and to mercy the God of armies, the Arbiter of wars. But the King of France was still a child in leading-strings. And the buoyant heart of Catharine, her cheerful cynicism, were not to be depressed by even this nightmare that had fallen on the afflicted land, making it one wide realm of madness, where madmen battled for mastery. Let them destroy one another! By and by, when the fanatics had all fallen, or when the scourge had taught them saner manners, the Royal House, now temporarily eclipsed, would once more enjoy its ancient supremacy over all the creeds and all the factions!

It was on the 19th of December 1562 that the Huguenots and the Royal army found themselves face to face near Dreux. With the King's forces were the Duke of Guise, the old Constable, and St. André. On the other side, Jeanne's gallant brother-in-law Condé was in command; and with him the astute and stern Coligny and the valiant d'Andelot.

As the two armies lay within striking distance, the Triumvirate sent Castelnau to announce to the Queen-Regent that the critical hour had arrived, and

to inquire if it were agreeable to her to hazard the future of the State, the future of the Crown, on a battle the fortunes of which no man dare prophesy.

To Catharine nothing could be more distasteful than the invitation to make such a decision. Had the Triumvirate been certain of victory, they would not have troubled to consult her. Had they been assured that defeat was inevitable, they would have avoided battle, had that been possible; but it hardly was possible unless the Huguenots should feel disposed to stand idle while they beat a retreat; or unless the droll spectacle was to be witnessed of two armies, as brave men as ever took the field, turning their backs upon each other from motives of policy.

Catharine fully appreciated the motives which had inspired such men as Guise and Montmorency to ask her counsel.

"I am astonished," she said to Castelnau, "that such captains as the Duke of Guise and St. André should send to ask advice on such an issue from a woman and a child!"

At the moment the King's foster-mother entered the apartment.

"Nurse," said the Queen, "what do you think! The time has come when they inquire from women when they shall give battle!"¹

With this Castelnau had to be content. And the Triumvirate, finding that Catharine would not accept responsibility for the inevitable fight, should perforce take it upon their own shoulders.

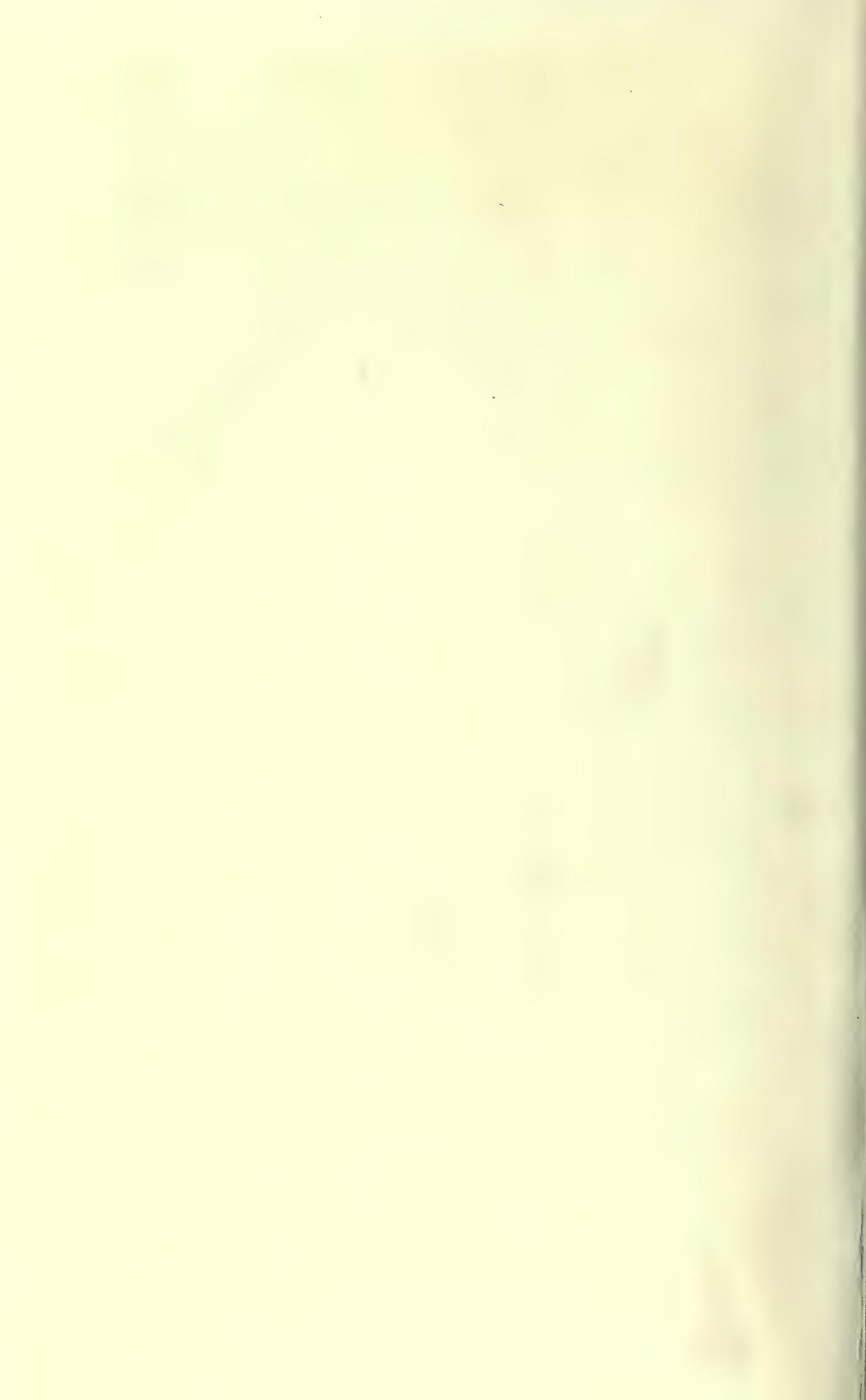
The responsibility was doubtless a heavy one—so

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."



From a contemporary engraving

FRANCIS, DUKE OF GUISE



heavy that it is easy to understand why they would gladly have transferred it to Catharine and the boy-King.

The old Constable was in supreme command of the Royal forces. Brave as a lion, he had no real talent for generalship. Worse still, he was not readily amenable to the guidance of wiser heads. Guise was a great captain ; but he had the misfortune, when the final manœuvres had been executed, of seeing the Royal army occupying the ground that afforded the least advantage in the coming fight.

Indeed the generals on either side were well matched. Condé, commanding the Huguenots, was, like Montmorency, brave to a fault. As a subordinate officer, leading cavalry, he would have been an ideal chief. But as a general he was totally devoid of the *coup d'œil militaire*. In the excitement of battle he thought only of his own division, leaving his lieutenants to co-operate with him as best they could, or, if misfortune overtook them, to extricate themselves or succumb to superior force just as the gods and their own genius might decree it.

The Huguenots were superior in cavalry ; on the other hand, the Royal army had the advantage in infantry. From one o'clock in the afternoon until five the battle continued. At the outset, Condé with his habitual thoughtlessness blundered badly ; it might have been hopelessly, but that Montmorency, in essaying to take advantage of it, exposed his whole force to the enemy's cavalry. Coligny, swift to detect his opportunity, saved the situation. In a twinkling he was down on the French with his swarm of

horsemen, who at close quarters discharged their pistols into the masses of infantry and, without pause, hurled themselves with lance and sword on the foe. Montmorency had his horse killed under him; but in a moment he was mounted again. A second later, however, he received a bullet from a pistol and was made prisoner.

The infantry, unprepared for this lightning attack and shaken by the volley at close quarters, opened their ranks to the cavalry, and fell like corn before the reapers. At this moment it looked, indeed, as if all were lost; and some of the fugitives from the field, convinced that all was over, never drew rein until their jaded steeds entered the courtyard of the Louvre.

Catharine was informed of the quick succession of events on the battlefield. Montmorency wounded, a prisoner! All was lost! So said the fugitives, and well might they think that in truth it was so.

But the Florentine was imperturbable.

"Well," she replied, "we will pray to God in French!"¹

If only they had announced to her that Guise, not Montmorency, was a prisoner, Catharine perhaps would have been stirred by joy from her wonted serenity. But the crowning gift of the gods was not yet to be vouchsafed her.

It was indeed Guise who brought to the palace the true version of how the battle of Dreux had ended. It was a grim story. Eight thousand men lay dead upon the field—half Catholics, half Hugue-

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

nots. St. André was dead ; the Duke of Nevers was wounded. The great soldier who stood before her was greater than ever. He was now the Triumvirate !

But that was not all. If Montmorency had been made a prisoner, so too had the chief of the Huguenots. Condé was in Guise's hands, who, with something of the chivalry so sadly missing at Vassy, treated the Prince with all possible courtesy, sharing with him his supper and his bed, for food and shelter were scarce in the Royal camp when the sun went down on the field of Dreux.

From Dreux the scene shifted to Orleans. Thither Guise hastened, to set the crown upon his achievements. On the 5th day of February 1564 the siege began. During the early days of the operations d'Andelot distinguished himself on the side of the Huguenots by his valour in opposing the assaults of the besiegers. Though he was suffering from fever, his vigilance and activity were the admiration of the army. He was ably seconded by the Frenchmen under his command. But the mercenaries failed him as they did at Dreux. They were driven from position to position, until the city had been reduced to desperate straits.

Guise, elated at the prospect of a victory which would make the King's army master of France, which would make him master of King and Queen-Regent, master of army and of France, pressed on the operations with all possible dispatch. On the 19th of February Orleans was to be carried by storm. In the camp of the besiegers there were

twenty thousand men. Heaven help Orleans, its garrison, its citizens, their women, their children, when these legions should have the town at their mercy!

Within the doomed walls there passed from lip to lip horrifying tales of the fate designed for them when the Man of Vassy should be Master of Orleans. Well may the hapless wretches, whose lives were but the sport of great men's whims and ambitions, have withered away with fear, ruminating on the days of woe to come.

It was said that the Duke had written to Catharine that he would kill everybody in Orleans; that the very dogs would share in the chastisement to fall upon the place; that, finally, not a stone would be left upon a stone where the enemies of the King had made their citadel! Such a letter was doubtless never written. But the report which received credence—as, considering all things, well it might—illuminates the miseries of mind endured by the simple folk, strangers to the use of arms, indifferent to the claims of either chief, desiring only to live and to let live, now waiting for horrors of which the most merciful was the sword!

But Destiny had not so written the fate of Orleans, the infamy of Guise.

A gentleman of Angoumois, named Jean Poltrot de Merey, imagined himself raised up by Heaven to save the town from impending destruction. He had lived for a long time in Spain, and spoke the language with so much fluency that he was able to pass as a Spaniard. His qualifications were pre-

cisely those needed in a spy, and Coligny was glad so to employ him in the enemies' camp.

De Merey had attached himself without difficulty to Guise, and was doubtless aware that on the 19th the blow was to fall which would make Orleans a scene of never-to-be-forgotten lamentations.

Like one of the agents of Divine wrath in the Old Testament, he prepared with prayer for the dark deed for which he imagined Heaven had chosen him. When evening fell, his plans were ready. The Duke lodged at the Château de Coeney. De Merey went out towards the place. He could go unchallenged where he would: was he not the Spaniard who served the generalissimo? A thick wood invited the assassin to its shadows. Not even the eagle eye of Guise would see aught in the black bosom of the foliage to warn him of danger.

De Merey prepared his pistol. In a little while the Duke came along. The pistol was ready. The marksman's hand never faltered; enthusiasm steeled nerve and heart. He would save Orleans. And he did. . . . A report of firearms rang out through the night, and the fanatic's bullet had mortally wounded Duke Francis.

Immediately the assassin flung himself upon his horse and galloped from the scene. But some instinct of the soldier overcame him, and, drawing rein, he returned to answer for his handiwork.

At the dawn, not far from the scene of his crime, he was seized and taken to the Royal camp, where he accused Coligny and Théodore de Bèze of having abetted his crime.

Meanwhile Guise still lingered. The sun rose and the sun sank on the 19th, still Orleans remained unshaken. The Duke had other matters to engage his few remaining days. On the 24th of February he was no more. And another of the great figures who had contested with Catharine the government of France had vanished from the lists where soon she would be supreme because she would be alone.

Guise with his last breath recommended his family to the protection of Catharine de' Medici. The Queen-Regent accepted with alacrity the responsibility thus thrust upon her by the dying man. His eldest son, the young Prince of Joinville, was made Governor of Champagne. Other honours were conferred upon the second son. Why not? Their mighty sire had had the grace to die, no matter how, and that was the most loyal service he could render to the Queen-Regent.

While Guise was alive, peace was impossible. It should be a fight to the death. But war was hateful to Catharine, except in so far as it enabled her enemies to destroy each other. Most of them were now destroyed. Of Condé and Montmorency she had no fear. The Prince was his own supreme enemy; he might be depended upon to ruin himself. And Montmorency was very old; time would deal with him. The head of the House of Bourbon was a mere boy; the head of the House of Guise was also but a youth. At Dreux and elsewhere the Huguenots had suffered terribly. Blood had flown in rivers; their money was exhausted. The hour had come for peace.

Catharine therefore approached the Princess of

Condé with friendly overtures; and as a result of the negotiations, the Prince and the Constable were taken under guard to the Ile-aux-Bœufs, near Orleans. There the two generals discussed the terms upon which peace might be restored to their afflicted country.

Condé demanded toleration for the Huguenots, in accordance with the famous edict of January. The Constable was steadfast in his refusal that the Huguenots should be given permission to assemble for public worship within the walls of Paris or any of the great towns.

Condé had recourse to the synod of Huguenot divines who had taken refuge at Orleans after the destruction of their churches. These were in no tractable mood. They not only demanded liberty of worship and the punishment of the authors of the massacre of Vassy; they also stipulated for vengeance on anabaptists and libertines.

Sismondi, commenting on the negotiations, says: "Condé, disgusted with their intolerance and their forgetfulness of the misfortunes of the nation, paid no further heed to them, and signed with the Queen, on the 12th of March, the treaty which was registered under the form of an edict, and published at Amboise the 19th of March 1563." By this edict the free exercise of their religion was permitted to the Huguenot nobles in their mansions, provided that only members of their families were admitted. As to the common people, certain places were set apart where the Huguenot religion should enjoy the fullest liberty. These were the towns in which the Hugue-

nots were masters at the time of the signing of the treaty. At the same time, full pardon for having borne arms against the King was extended to Condé, as well as to all the nobles, gentlemen, soldiers, and citizens who had participated in the rebellion.

The King declared that "he held Condé for a devoted kinsman, subject, and servant, and all those who had followed him for good and loyal subjects, believing that everything that had been done by them had been from worthy motives and for the service of the King."

Never perhaps had rebellion been more handsomely eulogised. If Royal words could salve wounds, if they could blot out Vassy from men's minds and obliterate the memory of a thousand infamies, all would have been well. But as matters stood, the extreme Catholics, blind to the fact that the unity of Christendom was broken beyond repair, held that the treaty conceded too much. The extreme Huguenots, eager not for toleration but for supremacy, held that it gave too little, that Condé had betrayed them. They may well have thought that had Jeanne been their representative in the conferences, the result would have been very different. If the Medici wanted peace at the hands of the Queen of Navarre, then should she pay for it a price that would atone almost for Vassy itself! And so it came to pass that the treaty settled nothing.

It was a bargain with which nobody was satisfied save the Queen-Regent.

CHAPTER XV

JEANNE DECLINES THE HAND OF DON CARLOS

MEANWHILE, it occurred to the statesmen at Madrid that the problem of Navarre must at last be settled by the old but simple expedient of a marriage.

Jeanne was only thirty-four. Had happiness been vouchsafed her during her life with Antoine, her thirty-four years would doubtless have sat lightly on the widow. But however young her heart, however fresh her charms, a woman of thirty-four is apt to be an unhappy choice for a boy of eighteen. Yet this was the age of the Prince who was now mentioned at Madrid as a candidate for the hand of the widow of Pau.

Jeanne's young suitor was Don Carlos, only son of Philip II., a prince whose tragic fate has almost lifted his memory out of the region of prosaic history and transmuted him into a hero of romance as dark as any ever enacted in the mysterious recesses of a Royal palace.

The history of the times proves, over and over again, that differences of age were of small consequence where a political marriage was under consideration. Catharine de' Medici had proposed King Charles for Elizabeth of England. Worse still, they

had proposed his brother, young Anjou, though both were children, while the English Queen was a lady of mature years. Jeanne herself had been carried to the altar as a child to wed one whom she hated. And willing hands and strong ones would carry Don Carlos to the altar to wed the Queen of Navarre, if his stern parent would have it so.

Of the sincerity of Philip in the negotiations now opened, there is small room for doubt. Such a marriage would place Navarre at his mercy. And Navarre was the key to the heart of France. Moreover, Jeanne's son was the first Prince of the Blood after the last of the Valois; and the Valois were fast dying out. There had been Francis, and now Charles, and after him there was but another boy. None of them gave promise of long life. And then came young Henry of Bearn, whom now he would make his son's stepson; and the relationship, instead of advancing his claims, might very well, should occasion arise, serve as an apology for placing a Prince of the House of Hapsburg on the throne of the united kingdoms of France and Navarre. Philip may well indeed have dreamt dreams of a mighty Empire, ruled by his issue, in which Western Europe from the Low Countries to the Mediterranean would be welded into one State.

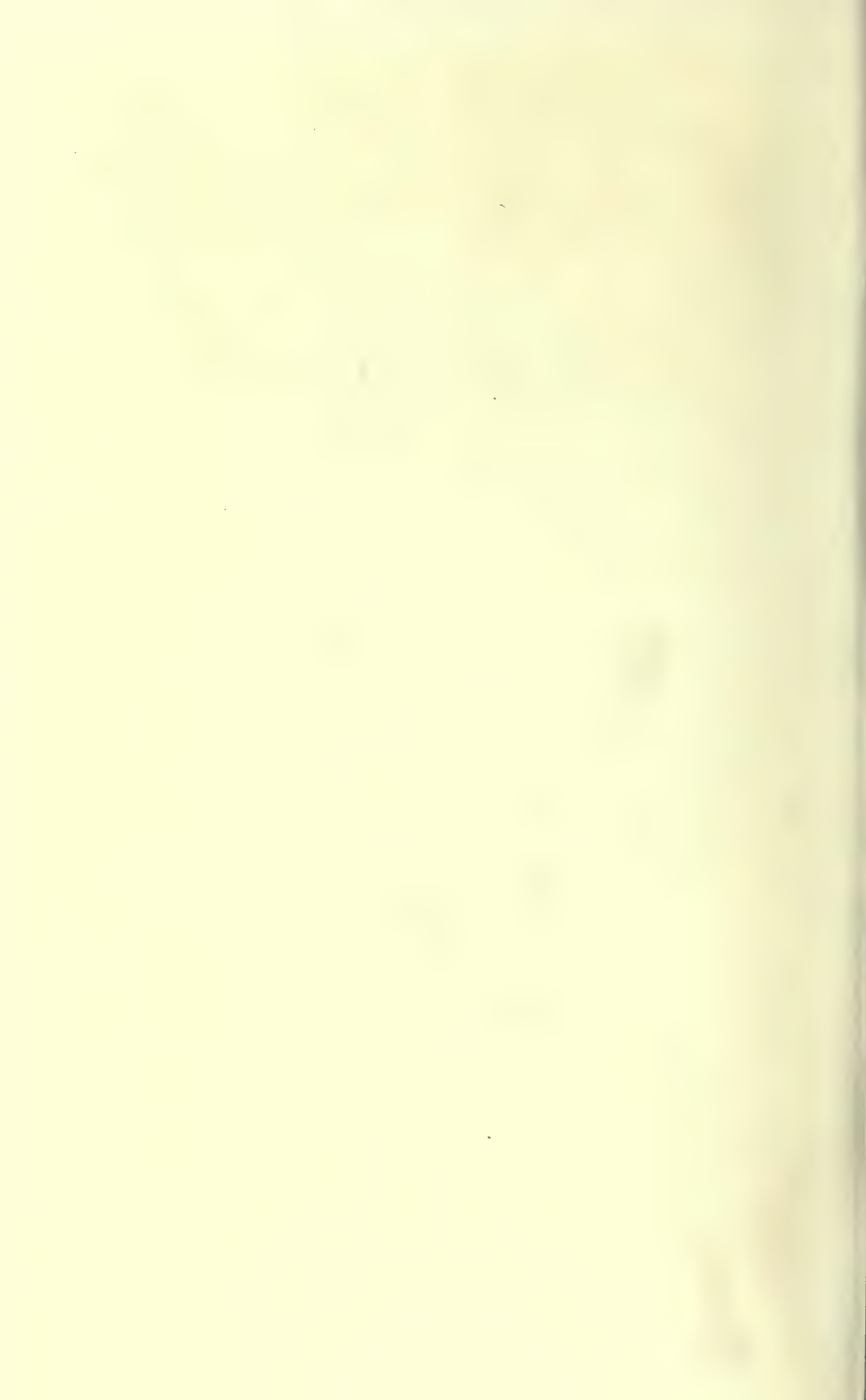
But such dreams were soon dispelled. The story goes that Carlos was to have been betrothed to the lovely and gracious lady who had become his father's third wife. When it was considered how the hand of the Princess Elizabeth might be best employed to cement the friendship of France and Spain, the



From a contemporary engraving

DON JOHN, PRINCE OF THE HOUSE OF HAPSBURG

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negotiators had chosen as her husband-elect little Don Carlos. But Philip chose for the girl one greater than Carlos. He himself would be her bridegroom, and Elizabeth became Queen of Spain.

As Carlos grew into manhood, his reckless character, his tempestuous passions, became the despair of the Court. It is said that, looking upon the face of Queen Elizabeth, he could not forgive his father that so great a prize, so much sweetness, beauty, grace, and truth, should be lost to him beyond all vestige of hope.¹ Never was a Prince's brief career the subject of so much wild gossip, so many tragic rumours. And hearing, as she must have heard, of his wild, his mad escapades in Madrid, Jeanne assuredly never thought of linking her life with his. She had had as husband an inveterate rake, everybody's dupe. She would not have as his successor a madman.

But meanwhile the negotiations should run their appointed course. The Spanish envoy at the Court of Pau was one Juan Martinez d'Escurra, one Jansana being his secretary. D'Escurra put the names of two cavaliers forward for Jeanne's acceptance. As an alternative to Don Carlos, the Queen of Navarre could have the hand of Don John of Austria, the illegitimate son of Charles V., he who in later years by his gallantry at Lepanto earned for himself immortal renown. Jeanne decided without hesitation that Don Carlos would be the more suitable husband, if husband she should accept from the House of Hapsburg.

¹ "Life of Philip II."

Jeanne must have impressed the Spaniards with the sincerity of her motives, for we find Jansana writing to d'Escurra, who was absent at the time in Paris, that the Queen of Navarre was excessively flattered by the hope of an alliance with so august a prince.

D'Escurra, apparently satisfied that Jansana was a penetrating observer, forthwith wrote to Philip's Secretary of State, Eraso, as follows :¹

"On the 29th of March I informed your Excellency that we were expecting an answer from the wife of Vendôme² upon the memorandum which we read to her, respecting religious affairs ; and whether she will submit her opinions to the judgment of the forthcoming council. As to the matrimonial projects, I have heard that she is willing, if such is his Majesty's desire ; but that she desires to espouse his Majesty's son, rather than his brother. I suspect that as she is not yet assured of this marriage, she will pledge herself to nothing. . . ."

It would seem that Jeanne had not lost altogether the art of diplomatic dissimulation. The Spanish envoys imagined that the negotiation was making progress, and thought of having recourse to the Baron Audaux to enlist his influence in the council of his sovereign. Jeanne instantly forbade any mention of the marriage project to Audaux or any other of her subjects. She was doubtless unwilling that men's minds should be unsettled by the discussion of

¹ Freer, "Life of Jeanne d'Albret."

² Jeanne d'Albret.

schemes and the absorption of ideas that could in the long run only prove an obstacle to her true policy.

The Spaniards had not long to wait for a revelation of their own folly. In June 1563 Jeanne had done with dissimulation. She had, doubtless, waited so long for reasons concerned with her secret relations with the Huguenot chiefs. She now issued an open declaration of war upon the Catholic Church. In the preamble to this edict, she declared :

“ We ordain, declare, and command by this our present edict, that we will that all our subjects of the said countries, of whatever condition and degree, do make public profession of the faith which we now publish under our seal and authority, as being most surely grounded on the doctrine and written word of the prophets and apostles ; and that no one may plead ignorance in default of obedience, we have thought meet to command that the said articles of faith should be incorporated and inserted in these our said letters-patent.”¹

The overwhelming majority of Jeanne's subjects were Catholic. In Lower Navarre the Huguenots were but a handful of the population. In Bearn they were rather more numerous. The Queen nevertheless not only by a stroke of her pen forbade the majority to remain faithful to the religion of their ancestors, but in the same decree confiscated buildings and lands and all the revenues of the Church. She published

¹ Freer's "Life."

the articles of faith to which henceforth her people were to subscribe ; and at the same time established a council of nine ecclesiastics who were to regulate for the future the path along which the Navarrois were to travel to Heaven. To this ecclesiastical commission was to be handed over all the wealth so lightly confiscated, to be employed by them in endowing and maintaining the new Church. The further terms of the decree are of interest as shedding light upon the institutions which were to be suppressed. It provided :

“ Forasmuch as it is expedient to elect competent persons to administer these temporalities, we ordain and command that all the lands hitherto appertaining to the said bishops, canons, abbés, deans, archdeacons, deacons, priors, curés, prebends, monks, and nuns, in virtue of nomination, or presentation from patrons, lay or ecclesiastical, and which they enjoyed in virtue of their several titles, and institution, by the provision of their ordinaries, or of the pope, and which they possessed under the title of benefices, or commanderies, or hospital for lepers, or hospitals for the sick generally, or brotherhoods, or chapelries, shall, from the present time and henceforth, be placed under the control, government, and administration of the said council.”

The injustice of these proceedings was only equalled by their unwisdom. The gods had indeed driven Jeanne mad, and she now seemed bent upon accomplishing her own destruction. Thus far, it might have been supposed, her hostility had been to

the politics of Rome rather than to its faith. On the whole she had, while exercising her right to worship in her own way, abstained from violent interference with the exercise of the same liberty in others. But now she stood forth as the fiercest iconoclast in Europe, one who, having embarked upon a crusade of tyranny, was driven from extreme to extreme by the momentum of each preceding step in her reckless, her desperate policy. But not without moments of seeming doubt and hesitation did she hurry along the sorry course into which she had now strayed. The decree of wholesale confiscation was followed by another rather less resolute in tone, though in operation it was no less harsh. In this she provided that certain churches should be handed over to the Huguenots; but that in those places where the two bodies were equally divided, the church should be common property.

Having thus conceded to the owners of property a share in what was entirely their own, Jeanne issued a decree authorising the removal of all images, relics, and shrines from the churches of Bearn, and the confiscation of all the sacred vessels, the accumulated gifts of ages, that had hitherto been used in the service of the sanctuary. The Queen herself was a witness of the carrying out of some of these ordinances, and a tragic figure must this old-young woman have presented as, standing beneath the hoary columns of a majestic cathedral, her haggard face stamped with the seal of Death, she watched her vandals strip the ornaments from the walls, rifle the treasury, and cast down the altars that, no longer for her temples of

mystery, had ceased to possess either charm or sanctity.

Violent commotions were the immediate fruit of these decrees. The people of Bearn were ardently loyal to the Royal House, but they loved the faith of their fathers still more, and even at the bidding of the gallant Jeanne they would not change it. The spoliation of the churches led to riots in which blood flowed, and occasionally the Queen's commissioners had to temper zeal with discretion, and leave to the people the quiet possession of the churches—images, altars, and all—in which they had been accustomed to worship.

It might have been supposed that these events would have brought to an abrupt conclusion the negotiations for Jeanne's alliance with a Spanish Prince. Nevertheless, in the midst of the Queen's crusade against every vestige of ornament and symbolism in the churches—that is to say, in June 1563—d'Escurra, who was still in Paris, wrote to the Secretary of State at Madrid :

“The secretary, Jansana, certifies to me that the wife of Vendôme¹ greatly desires the completion of the marriage between herself and the Prince of Spain, but not the alliance proposed between herself and the uncle of the said Prince. Jansana asks whether I have informed your Excellency of this, to which I replied in the affirmative. He further stated that if this project, which is most desirable, be persisted in, so that she can rely on the performance of the articles

¹ Jeanne.

proposed in the letter sent to her, the wife of Vendôme will remain faithful to the Catholic Apostolic Church, and that all will end prosperously, especially if the hand of the Prince be tendered for her acceptance."

To this letter the Spanish Secretary of State dispatched a reply which alludes in terms of apparent sincerity to the proposed marriage as the simplest solution of the evils that were causing deep concern at Madrid:

"It appears to me," he wrote, "that each day our faith falls into greater disrepute; our churches are demolished, and many other things are perpetrated, most unworthy and prejudicial to the service of God our Master. These things are much felt here, and your Excellency may believe that his Majesty, being eminently a most Catholic Prince, and so near a neighbour to the realm of France, will never cease until he descries a remedy for these evils; which remedy would be best found in the alliance of Madame de Vendôme, should such be possible, as it would satisfy both herself and her party, and would afford ground for further negotiation."

D'Escurra had written to Madrid in a hopeful strain, because at the time he was not aware of the complete change that had come over Jeanne's government. Very soon, however, he realised how utterly he had misjudged the situation, how wildly he had misjudged Jeanne. One morning dispatches arrived from Jansana that awakened him with a

shock to his simplicity. At last he knew the bitter truth—that Jeanne, instead of leaving her people to themselves and to a creed with which they were content, had set herself to impose her own views upon them by force.

Instantly d'Escurra turned his back upon Paris, where he may well have imagined that he had tarried too long. In his absence, not only had all been lost from the point of view of his master, but, with Jeanne in a mood for warfare, France should look forward inevitably to a renewal of strife.

On reaching Pau, the Spanish envoy found that Jeanne had gone to Lescar.

Thither he followed her. Jeanne's lodgings were in the episcopal palace, and there she received him.

No artist has painted that meeting, yet the atmosphere was charged with high and uncommon drama.

In the palace gardens the Queen was walking with her ladies, when the Spaniard appeared upon the scene. She signed to her companions to retire, and alone, in the midst of the mid-summer luxuriance of the old garden of the bishops of Lescar, her Majesty received the obeisance of the Ambassador.

The Queen hated the very name of his country. From childhood the Spaniard had been to her the brigand who had riven Navarre in twain and seized the richer half. As she grew up that hatred had grown more intense, and all the craving to recover the lost territory had become a consuming passion. Her father had been a failure; her mother had been

a failure. Thus far, she had accomplished nothing; but that was Antoine's fault. Had he been cast in different mould, by guile or force, something would have been regained of all that was torn from them. But Antoine and his folly belonged to the past. She stood alone, and alone she had thundered forth a challenge to Spain, to France, to Rome, that may well have set one wondering if grief had bereft of her senses the widowed Queen.

Whatever should be the final outcome of her daring, Jeanne cannot have been altogether a stranger to some feeling of elation as she looked upon the Ambassador of her enemy. D'Escurra made no effort to disguise his wrath. What he had seen in Lescar had filled him with horror, as well indeed it might any man who had any appreciation of the beauty of order, of sobriety, of charity, of sympathy—every one a queenly virtue. During the brief hours of his stay in the town he had seen the desecrated cathedral, the empty sanctuary, the overturned pedestals, the ruined statuary. The Spaniard's fiery blood had boiled in his veins at the desolation wrought in the holy place, and now that he stood before the authoress of it all, his rage knew no governance.

His first words were a challenge.

"Madame," he said, "if I had thought to have seen all that I have beheld in this town, and in the church of Lescar, I should not have waited upon your Majesty in this place. Never before has there been committed by any Christian prince so enormous a sacrilege as has been perpetrated here. Omnipotent God! hast Thou indeed patience to suffer that the

Holy Sacrament of Thy Body should be impiously consumed by fire, with the image of Thy blessed Mother?"¹

As the envoy spoke, he handed to Jeanne a letter from his Royal master. The Queen, deeply agitated at the frank audacity of the Spaniard's rebuke, without opening King Philip's letter, demanded from the Ambassador to tell her what business it was of foreign princes what she did within her own dominions.

"I have acted," she said, "in accordance with the command of God as I read His holy Gospel."

D'Escurra, however, had thrown diplomacy to the winds. He boldly assured her that her notions of right and wrong were utterly perverse.

There this strange battle of words in the bishop's garden ended for the moment. Jeanne opened Philip's letter and read what seems to have been a polite intimation that he would march an army against her if Bearn did not cease to be a centre of Huguenot activity.

"Monseigneur," said Jeanne, when she had read to the last lines this rather mysterious letter, "I feel indebted to his Catholic Majesty for the interest which he deigns to show me, for which I remain his humble servant. I fain demonstrate, by my actions, the good will which I bear him on the several points discussed in this letter. In that which concerns the religion in which I have been born and educated, and professing the which my father, my mother, and my husband died, God gave me the dominion

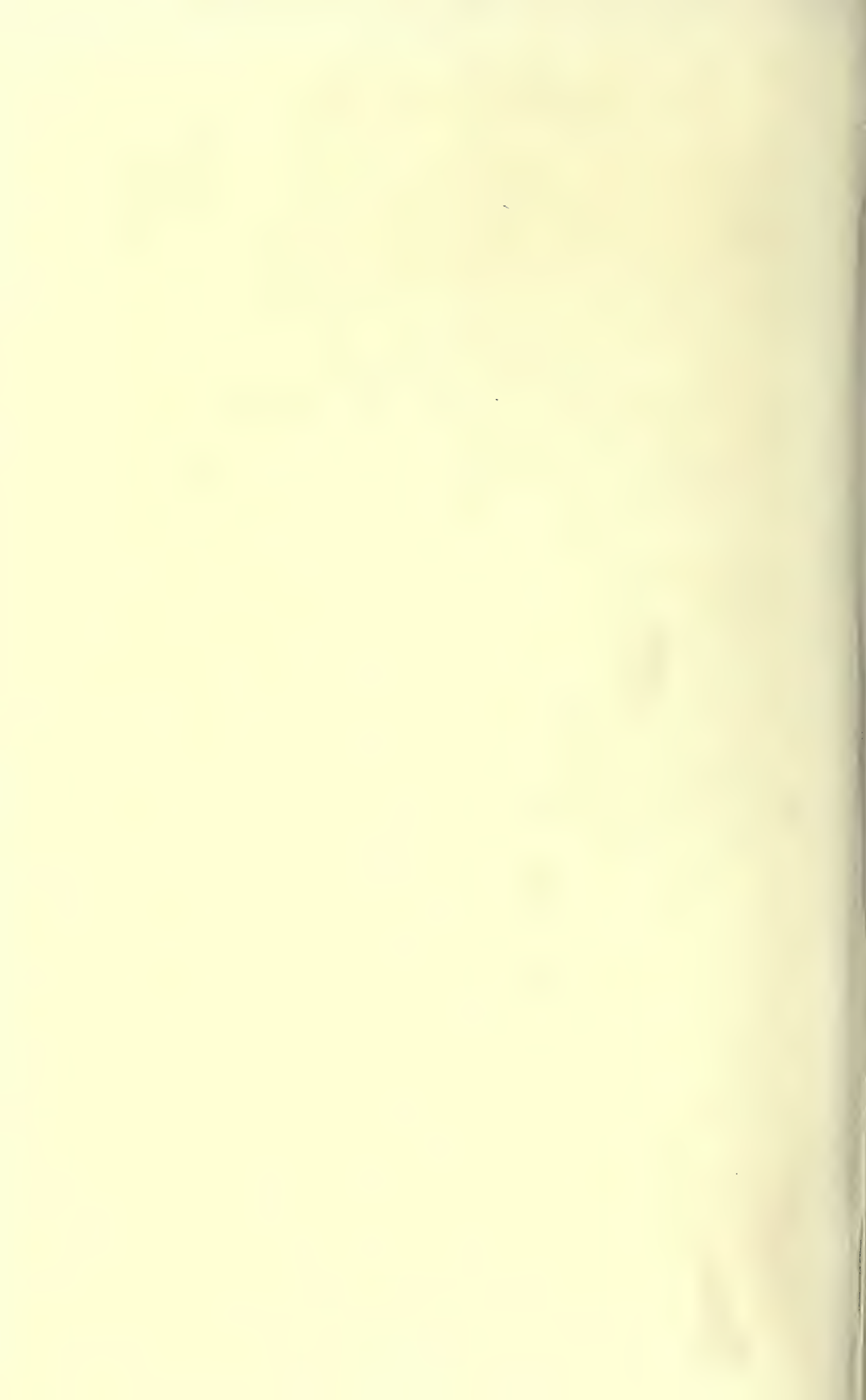
¹ Freer's "Life."



From a contemporary engraving

PHILIP II., KING OF SPAIN

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of these countries at a very youthful age, that I might rule by the guidance of His Gospel, and cause these holy precepts to be taught everywhere. If, for this act of duty, his Catholic Majesty chooses to declare war against me and my people, I commend my cause to God, Who is over all and above all. If it is the intention of the Catholic King to take advantage to do me harm, as his Majesty insinuates, of the contiguity of our vassals and territories, why does he not perform the same threats as respects the Queen of England, who has executed the very same things which I have done in her kingdom?"

Jeanne's allusion to the Queen of England probably supplies the master-key to her policy at this time. Elizabeth had recently broken with the Holy See, and she and her advisers had naturally recognised in the Queen of Navarre an ally who might be counted upon to fulfil in Southern Europe the same purpose that the Protestant Princes of Germany fulfilled in the North. The latter were a check upon the Emperor. Jeanne, in the same way, was more or less a check upon Philip, as well as a tower of strength to the French Huguenots. Relieved from these local distractions, the Emperor and Philip and even the young King of France would almost certainly have combined against the English Queen. No measures, therefore, were neglected by Elizabeth and her advisers that could be invoked to sustain Jeanne's courage and stimulate her to action that would raise up an impassable gulf between her and the Spanish King.

To Jeanne's taunt that Philip did not dare to

assail the Queen of England, that all his threats were reserved for Navarre, the Ambassador replied with a parable.

"Two men kill a third," he said. "From one Justice asks nothing; from the other she exacts retribution. . . . Finally, however, Justice pounces equally upon both!"

By this time the anger of the first heated words had given way to a more business-like air.

"What, in your opinion," she said, "would be the remedy to obviate all these things?"

"Madame," replied d'Escurra, "I know of no remedy excepting one, which is, that you command the arrest of all heretic ministers and others who have counselled you to commit this heinous crime; and, at the same time, assemble your nobles, gentry, and the principal citizens of your dominions. When this is done, you should, in the presence of them all, implore pardon of Almighty God; next, you must condemn those, your late evil counsellors and abettors, to the flames; and afterwards, command a solemn procession, and with your own hand replace the holy images in the churches whence, by your orders, they have been torn. You ought then to dispatch an embassy, to ask pardon and absolution from the Pope. . . . By so acting, Madame, you will mitigate the great anger felt against you by the Catholic Princes of Europe."¹

Never, declared Jeanne, would she act upon such counsel. There could be no going back upon what she had done only after profound consideration.

¹ Freer's "Life."

There the audience ended. For a little while afterwards Jeanne was so occupied with a group of quarrelsome barons that she had no time to resume the discussion, perhaps no heart for it. When the threads of the debate were again taken up, it was in the great hall of her castle at Pau.

The Queen began by asking if, she being a Huguenot, she could marry a Catholic. She then went on to say that she had reason to believe that an effort was being made to delude her in much the same fashion that had been practised on her dead husband. In Antoine's case they had held out to him the lure of a delightful kingdom on an island in the Mediterranean. To her they held out the lure of a marriage with Don Carlos or Don John. Sardinia had always been as far off from Antoine as though it were in the moon. And Don Carlos was as near to her as Sardinia had ever been to her husband, and no nearer!

This straightforward charge of bad faith was answered with precisely the same imputation.

"It is true, Madame," said the ambassador, "that neither the Prince of Spain nor yet Don John of Austria will consent to espouse a consort professing a religion contrary to his own belief, even were she Queen and mistress of the world itself. As to what you say that you see no proof sufficient on our part to lead you to believe in the sincerity of this proposed alliance, we also affirm that we perceive nothing on your side to encourage us to propose more. . . ."

To this Jeanne replied that until she had com-

pleted the prescribed year of mourning for her husband, she would not think of marrying.

"When that is done," she said, "I may have changed my mind respecting this alliance." And added the cryptic sentiment: "Even if the King of Spain is pleased to keep on terms of friendship with me for so long."

"If you, Madame," replied d'Escurra, "were sensible of the offence which you have committed in the sight of God, I should have great hopes of a fortunate issue. But as you feel no remorse, I cannot anticipate a happy result."

By this time Jeanne's patience had deserted her; and launching out into a bitter tirade, the broken woman who as a young girl had sworn before the high altar at Tours, on the Holy Sacrament, that her marriage with Cleves was no marriage, now roundly avowed that the solemn ceremony had been but mummery:

"What you term Sacrament, monseigneur," she exclaimed, "is an idolatrous fraud, which has caused the everlasting perdition of countless souls! I saw the wafer belonging to the church of Lescar, which was made only of flour and water, kneaded together with a crucifix. . . . And you assert that God is incarnate there!"

"That Sacrament, madame," replied d'Escurra indignantly, "was the Body of God; and, as such, adored and revered by all orthodox Catholics. But as you hold it in such little esteem, I may no longer converse with you."

There was no more to be said. D'Escurra

requested his dismissal ; his business in Bearn was done. Jeanne would not detain him. But before sending him away to make his report to his Royal master—a report which she knew would be as injurious to her as words could make it—the Queen could not resist the wild impulse throbbing within her to vent her wrath to the bitter dregs upon this envoy of the hated race who dared to rebuke her in her own halls.

“ Monseigneur,” she said, “. . . I leave all to your discretion. You perceive my intentions at the present time, and for the future. My conscience dictates this course ; for, even if I knew that the King of Spain, or any other potentate, would take my head, and before my death slay my children under my eyes, I would suffer all, sooner than believe any other creed than that which I now profess. I desire the favour and friendship of the Catholic King more than that of any other Prince ; nevertheless, I am not so forlorn and defenceless but that I command the allegiance of fifteen hundred gentlemen of valour, all professing the reformed faith ; besides which, I have thirty thousand soldiers, who would die to accomplish my will ; and all the warriors who fought in France during the last Civil War have placed their swords at my disposal ! ”

D'Escurra seems to have had his heart in the mission entrusted to him. He wrote to Philip in terms of more than official regret at his failure to achieve an understanding between Spain and “ Madame de Vendôme.” But since that had been proved impossible, it only remained to subdue by force of arms this

woman whom they could not cajole. He advised Philip to invade Navarre at once, as nobles and people were disaffected because of Jeanne's innovations. Philip, however, was not ready for such extreme measures. D'Escurra was instructed to reopen negotiations with Jeanne, and persuade her, if possible, to rest content with what she had done against the Catholics, to stay the hands of the iconoclasts and vandals.

In Paris it began to be whispered, however, that Spanish legions would march to chastise the House of Albret. That rumour seems to have reached the ears of Catharine de' Medici, who at once wrote to Jeanne informing her of her peril. The dauntless widow immediately wrote to Jansana, who still remained in Pau, that she was aware of his Royal master's intentions, and that should mighty Spain strike at Navarre, she would encounter no despicable foe.

"The Queen," she wrote, "has . . . done me the honour to write to me, that she has heard a rumour that the Spanish King intends to invade my dominions, but she assures me that neither the King nor herself will suffer such an outrage. Besides which, nearly the whole of my friends, relatives, and allies, design to come to my assistance. You will, therefore, take an early opportunity of informing me of all that you have to communicate respecting this design."

That was the end of the Spanish marriage. Don Carlos was not to have as his bride a broken woman

of middle age. He was, alas! to have no bride at all. Deeper than even the tragedy of Jeanne d'Albret was that of the young Prince of Spain, and only the stones of the Escorial, to this day, know the truth of those last hours in which, by some unknown hand, moved by some unknown decree, the fevered flame of life was extinguished for ever in Philip's only son.

CHAPTER XVI

THE THUNDERS OF THE VATICAN

IN Rome, meanwhile, stern measures were concerted against Jeanne.

Pope Pius IV. filled the Papal chair during this period which finally decided the divergent channels along which during succeeding ages the streams of Christian thought should flow. Until the close of the Council of Trent the majority of observers had doubtless hoped that in some way the differences of Christendom would be reconciled, that strife would somehow exhaust itself, and, after all the bloodshed and travail of half a century, that peace and unity would once more prevail.

Pius was desirous, above all things, of peace, if peace could be secured by benevolent measures.

An Ambassador from Savoy came soliciting his aid against Geneva, hoping that assistance would readily be forthcoming for an attack upon the centre of the new opinions.

"What sort of times are these," said he, "for making such proposals? We are determined to remain at peace."¹

The Council of Trent was the means chosen by

¹ Ranke, "Hist. of the Popes."

the Pontiff to elicit order from the deepening confusion of the times.

Pius had no fear of reform. He came indeed of a stock that neither in the council nor in the field feared anything. Sprung from modest parents, he had attained eminence by his own unaided efforts. Once seated in the chair of Peter, he gave "proof of all the zeal that was to be expected from so exalted a pastor." To criticism of his design to submit all to a Council, he replied:

"Let what requires reformation be reformed, even though it be our own person and our own affairs. If we have any other thought than to do God service, then may God visit us accordingly!"¹

The Council, which had been twice interrupted, at length opened at Trent in January 1562, and Jeanne's truculent challenge to all the powers of Catholicism, now imbued with new zeal, coincided with the closing session of its deliberations.

The Cardinal d'Armagnac, who represented Rome in Southern France, had apparently learned nothing of the commotions in Bearn until he returned from Trent. The news he then heard must have quenched whatever hopes his Eminence had cherished that he would return to find the Queen of Navarre subdued by the anathemas of the General Council. The Bishop of Lescar he held responsible for the sacrileges perpetrated at his cathedral by the Sovereign. The aged Bishop seems to have entertained a comfortable indifference as between the old and the new, and, while adhering to his allegiance to Rome, had tamely

¹ Ranke.

acquiesced in the spoliation and desecration of his cathedral. One fine morning this easy-going prelate received from the Cardinal a stern reminder that he had basely failed in his trust. It ran :

“ MONSIEUR,—

“ I have been long without believing what occurred lately in your church of Lescar, because it could not enter into my imagination that you would concert the ruin of the said church ; nor yet so unworthily abandon the flock over which you are appointed, to side with the enemies of God and of Christendom. I am, however, constrained to believe, and to hold for truth, that in your presence, and by your consent, the images in your said church of Lescar have been taken from the altars, the crucifixes and the baptismal fonts broken, the ornaments and reliquaries sequestered, and your priests and canons suspended and forbidden to serve God according to the ritual of our Catholic Church ; and all this you have permitted, in order to introduce heresy, and sanction the preaching of abominable errors ; the which the devil has sown, in our days, by the instrumentality of his ministers.

“ Monsieur, can it be possible that you have so far forgotten the duties of your priestly calling, the salvation of your soul, the repose of your conscience, the faith that you have vowed to God, and the obligations that you have contracted in the sight of men ?

“ A prelate, so advanced in years as yourself, who has so solemnly sworn obedience to the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ, and engaged to feed His sheep,

to cherish them, and to keep them within the fold—can he forget himself so immeasurably as to commit so notable a perjury, and to abandon his poor flock to become a prey of famishing wolves? Monsieur, Monsieur, I fear me that the scandal and the crime are so infinite, that retribution will fall upon him who has committed them!"¹

The aged Bishop held high secular rank in Bearn, being President of the States, and apparently a pliant instrument in the hands of his Royal mistress. He now hastened to Court to inform Jeanne of the trouble that had overtaken him as the penalty of his loyalty. But neither had the Queen herself been forgotten by the incensed Cardinal. To her he had also written a bold rebuke, the more stinging because it reminded her Majesty that her people were resolute in their opposition to her innovations, and that even the States-General, less compliant than their president, had declared against her. D'Armagnac, who expressed his resentment, perhaps, the more freely because he was the Queen's cousin, wrote:

"MADAME,—

"I cannot deny that I have felt great and just regret on learning what has recently happened in your town of Lescar, when the images in the church were felled, the fonts and altars destroyed, the jewels, ornaments, and silver plate seized by your people, and the canons and priests interdicted from celebrating their accustomed service.

"All this is the more to be deplored, Madame,

¹ Freer's "Life."

as I understand that the said outrage was committed in your presence, and by your commandment. Reflect, Madame, on the consequences of this enterprise, which can only entail great disasters, and which has been concocted by the evil counsellors you retain around your person, who, under pretext of religion, would place you in such a position that, unless God Himself interposes, you could not extricate yourself.

“Madame, although you are minded through their evil counsel to plant a new religion in your countries of Bearn and Lower Navarre, the design will not succeed.

“Your subjects will never consent; they have already plainly intimated to you, during the session of the States-General, that they will never abandon the faith in which they have been nurtured.

“Assure yourself, Madame, that you have to deal with a people constant and devoted to the traditions and customs of their country; and that were you to touch even the smallest of their seignorial rights, you would find a jealous resistance of the design; how much greater, therefore, will be their opposition, when you attempt to force their conscience, and to deprive them of the religion of their ancestors.”¹

The Cardinal went on to remind Jeanne that her dominions were encircled by France and Spain, and that Philip would gladly avail of the pretext afforded by her policy to invade her dominions.

“I do not know, Madame,” proceeded the Cardinal, “what our own King will say to the matter, and

¹ Freer's "Life."

whether he will not himself seize your territories rather than suffer another to possess himself of them. Assure yourself therefore, Madame, that it is impossible for you to plant peacefully and to maintain permanently a new religion in your small territories, surrounded as you are by such potent kings, you not having as a rampart and defence the great ocean as has the realm of England.

"I know full well, Madame, that you will say to me that you prefer to forfeit kingdom, duchy, and principality, and to content yourself with a revenue of five hundred livres, rather than relinquish your enterprise, which is founded, as you imagine, on the Gospel. But, Madame, your children have deserved better from you than that you should deprive them of such fine heritages which the Kings of holy memory, your Royal ancestors, have so carefully preserved for them; having first placed the crown of a kingdom and of so many duchies and principalities upon your head, that you might transmit it unimpaired to Monseigneur the Prince, your son."

Jeanne did not accept meekly her eminent cousin's reproaches. She replied, as he had anticipated she would, that the course she had chosen was recommended to her by her study of the Gospel. The work of destruction at Lescar and elsewhere she justified by an appeal to the Old Testament. She would not have it made a reproach against her, as it had been made against some of the Kings of Israel, that, though she had believed, she had not cast down the high places consecrated to idols. She had

cast them down! She denied that she was engaged in the building up of a new religion. She was only restoring the ruins of the old. She assured him that he had been misinformed with regard to certain matters. For example, the States-General had, she averred, tendered her obedience, likewise her people.

Nor did the Cardinal's threat of interference from Spain pass unanswered.

"I know," proceeded Jeanne, "the Kings my neighbours perfectly: the one hates the religion which I profess; I also abhor his faith. Yet, despite this, I feel assured that we shall not cease to live in amity. Nevertheless, I have not taken so little heed of my affairs, nor am I so destitute of relations, allies, and friends, but that my remedy is promptly at hand if he decided otherwise. My other neighbour is he who sustains my strength and is the root of my race, from whence the great honour I have is to be an offshoot. This my neighbour abhors not the reformed faith, as you say; but permits its exercise around his person by the nobles and princes, amongst whom it is my son's happiness to be included, and, finally, throughout his kingdom. . . .

"You allege your authority over these countries, as the Pope's Legate: I receive here no legate, at the price which it has cost France. I acknowledge over me in Bearn only God—to whom I shall render account of the people He has committed to my care. As in no point have I deviated from the faith of God's Holy Catholic Church, nor quitted His fold, I bid you keep your tears to deplore your own errors;

to which out of charity I will add my own, putting up at the same time the most fervent prayer that ever left my lips, that you may be restored to the true fold. . . .

“Mon cousin, . . . I must entreat that you will use other language, when next you would have me believe that you address me, impelled as you affirm by motives of respect and by the duty which you say that you owe me ; and, likewise, I desire that your useless letter may be the last of its kind. . . .”

The issue with Rome was now fairly joined, and it became only a question of time until the storm that the Queen had courted should rage round her head. The Bishop of Lescar, true to his comfortable policy of being all things to all men, tried to make peace with the Holy See. Her people in Bearn were divided, with the overwhelming majority for the old opinions and the old ways. Her barons were either trimmers or hostile. It was apparent that in the day of trial Jeanne would have to solace herself with the sympathy of strangers, though the loyalty and devotion inbred in her own people for their Royal House would never leave her altogether friendless at the mercy of her enemies.

Severe measures were always disagreeable to Pius IV. A man of gentle and kindly disposition, whose training made him familiar with the intricacies of politics, he was slow to take extreme measures against those who, he realised, were often forced to appear as the patron of causes with which in their hearts they had no sympathy. The trend of

events in France seemed, however, to offer dangerous countenance to the violent crusade which Jeanne had undertaken. Catharine de' Medici had come to repose more and more confidence in l'Hôpital, who, though a Catholic, was so ardent an apostle of toleration that men said he was as much Huguenot as Catholic. Several of the bishops were rebels against the Holy See. Condé, Coligny, d'Andelot, and other Huguenot chiefs were in high favour, so that those who would attain rank and fortune through that section of the Court should perforce follow its religious tenets. At Trent had been decreed the only terms upon which unity was possible. But the whole tendency of things in France was away from unity, and by way of checking this tendency the first rumblings of the thunders of the Church were heard in October 1563.

To the gates of St. Peter's and of the Vatican was affixed the monitory of the Holy Office calling upon Jeanne to appear before the tribunal of the Inquisition in Rome, there to clear herself of the charge of heresy. Six months were given her in which to obey this summons. Then, should she fail, the sentence of excommunication would fall upon her.

To Jeanne the mere sentence of excommunication was a curse to be lightly borne. It was its political consequences that made even her proud heart quail. For once she had been formally placed outside the pale of the Church and denounced as a moral leper to Christendom, it would assuredly become the pious mission of Philip to rid her people of such a mistress

and make testimony of his faith by annexing her dominions to the Spanish crown!

It so happened that history was not written in strict accord with these apprehensions. When the time came, Philip did not seize Navarre. The unfortunate little kingdom experienced to the full the horrors of the sword, but the blade was not forged in Toledo.

Though Jeanne had spoken brave words to Escurra, the denunciations of the Vatican found her in more chastened mood. She had then boasted that hundreds of gentlemen and thousands of veterans were ready to serve in arms against an invader. But armies do not rise up at a sign from a magician's wand, and the remote existence of those scattered warriors whose loyalty was hers no longer sufficed to inflame her martial spirit. It was easy and very tempting to be a fire-eater in the old garden at Lescar when danger was far away. But she had too much penetration not to be alive now to the folly of having given free rein to her tongue, free currency to thoughts best locked away deep in her bosom. In the old days when her ancestors had fought against Spain, the people had stood solid for the Albrets. Now the people were divided: she herself had divided them. And if still they loved her and were sorry for her, they hated her opinions, and she could not be without some anxiety as to their conduct in a moment of national peril. In a long fight her chief support should be drawn from the French Huguenots, but these again would be helpless if the French Court did not countenance their efforts on her behalf. In any

event, they were a long way off. And she dare not summon them over the frontier to help her against some danger that at the moment was vague and shadowy. On the other hand, when the danger would have taken shape, it would then be too late. To avert therefore the evil day for which she was unprepared was now her great need; and, happily for her, the Queen-Regent of France, from motives of her own, was no less eager to save her from ruin.

CHAPTER XVII

ISABELLE DE LIMEUL'S LOVE-STORY

CATHARINE DE' MEDICI could not regard with indifference an act of the Holy See which placed Navarre at the mercy of Philip of Spain. True, her favourite daughter, Elizabeth, was Queen of Spain, and adored by her adopted country, so that Philip might be expected to show a filial consideration for the interests of his mother-in-law. But Catharine could afford to take no risks where there was some danger that a Spanish army might any day advance into the Pyrenees and possess itself permanently of all the strong places commanding the roads into the heart of France.

There was yet another reason why she could not hear unmoved Jeanne's petition. This was supplied by her dependence upon the Huguenot chiefs for the maintenance of such order as reigned in the kingdom. To turn a deaf ear to Jeanne would be to rebuff Condé and the Admiral. To espouse her cause in a diplomatic way at the Vatican would be a flattering tribute to the influence of the Huguenot chiefs, and would inspire their followers with hopes which, though they could never be realised, would none the less serve as a stimulus to the party not to be despised by experienced

politicians. But had there been no Huguenots to appease, the danger from Spain was sufficiently urgent to impel the Queen-Regent to act without a moment's unnecessary delay.

The Sieur d'Oysel was therefore dispatched to Rome, as her Majesty's special envoy, to secure that Jeanne should be exempt from the temporal pains and penalties of excommunication, above all from the forfeiture of her dominions.

Catharine's instructions were summarised in a letter written by her to the Bishop of Rennes, at that time the French Ambassador at the Court of the Emperor Maximilian, whose support was likely to be of much advantage during the negotiations pending at Rome.

"We have," she wrote, "given the said Sieur d'Oysel charge to make his Holiness comprehend that we do not acknowledge his authority and jurisdiction over those who bear the title of king or queen ; and that it is not for him to give their kingdoms and territories to any conqueror whatsoever ; and not even as respects the Queen of Navarre, who holds the greater part of her dominions under the King my lord and son."¹

D'Oysel himself was ordered to submit the Queen-Regent's views in a message which concluded with a threat that was doubtless meant to recall the days, not so very long before, when Rome had lain at the mercy of an invader. This document declared that unless the decree of excommunication against Jeanne was recalled, the King of France, "to his very great

¹ Freer's "Life."

and infinite regret, would find himself compelled to employ the remedy resorted to by his ancestors on such occasions—his Majesty being under the necessity thus to act, upon so just a demand as that made to him by the said Queen of Navarre ; which admonished him to spare neither the strength nor the power that God has given him, in aid of right ; all which, the King, upon occasion, is minded to do and perform.”

The Pope steadfastly refused to annul the decree. It was, however, eventually agreed that Jeanne should not as a consequence lose her dominions. In other words, Spain should not be encouraged to despoil her of the remnant of her territory and send her forth a Queen without crown or castle, dependent upon the bounty of her kindred for a place to lay her head.

To add to Jeanne's anxieties, rebellion broke out in Lower Navarre in December 1563, while the Parlements of Bordeaux and Toulouse declared her sovereign rights over Bearn to be invalid, that Charles was her suzerain.

With her own subjects in rebellion and her sovereign rights repudiated by the neighbouring provinces, Jeanne resolved to carry her grievances to Paris, where she still hoped to find friends who could alleviate her misfortunes. There was doubtless another motive which impelled her to take leave of her home in the depth of winter, and, though ill, to traverse a hostile and distracted country in which her very life must often have been in peril. This was her desire to confer with the Huguenot chiefs, and to see with her own eyes how the cause of her party and its champions stood at Court.

The Marshal de Montluc, Jeanne's implacable enemy, still commanded the French forces in the southern provinces. Before quitting her dominions, she desired to establish as her Lieutenant-General a soldier whom she could trust to maintain her authority with valour and address, should it be threatened by Montluc on the one hand or Philip on the other. The nobleman chosen by her for this office was the Count of Grammont. This nobleman was, however, attached to the French Court, and Jeanne therefore wrote to the Constable de Montmorency, begging that he might use his influence to have him detached for her service.

"Having ascertained," she wrote, "that it is his Majesty's good pleasure that I should repair to kiss his hand, I have resolved to journey to the Court. I have dispatched a courier to learn the route which his Majesty takes, and the place where he will that I should join the Court. Nevertheless, mon cousin, feeling that interest in the affairs of my principality of Bearn which I am bound to do, I am anxious to depose the chief authority, during my absence, in the hands of one who will govern prudently. I therefore humbly desire that his Majesty will command Monsieur de Grammont to repair hither; for I should be glad to commit this government to the care of one whom the King approves, to avoid all occasion for that calumnious dealing to which I have been subject. The thing which I desire most is, that as by my very humble obedience and faithful service to his Majesty I may set a worthy example to the subjects of this realm,

so also my territories may be those in which his Royal commands are most observed and honoured. I greatly fear that during my absence this may not be the case, for the reason which you may divine; for that intermeddler [Montluc], that enemy of concord, will never stay his hand until he has disquieted something, on purpose to say, 'It is in the country subject to the Queen of Navarre that this tumult arises'—a thing he would have before said, if I had not diligently maintained order everywhere. I fear, therefore, that he will find his opportunity during my absence. This is the reason wherefore I desire that the Queen should permit Monsieur de Grammont, at my request, to hold command during my absence over Bearn. He will be well obeyed, because he will be placed there by my authority, being my subject born, and a most worthy gentleman; moreover, if it pleased the Queen to command that he shall also govern over my dependencies, which are under the suzerainty of the King, his Majesty will there likewise be more implicitly obeyed."

Montmorency seems to have at once complied with Jeanne's request, and Grammont was dispatched to Pau to govern in her absence.

A little while before the departure of Jeanne from Pau to the French Court, Philip had sent thither an ambassador to exhort Catharine to take part in the deliberations of the Christian Princes as to the best mode of securing general acceptance for the decrees of the Council of Trent which had just concluded its sessions. The Queen-Regent, fearful of adding to her troubles, sent a vague reply to

Philip, always content to put off the evil day rather than adopt a definite policy. Philip knew, however, that he could count upon the chiefs of the Catholic party in France. They had, indeed, inspired his overtures, so that his action was but an indication of the intensity of the fires burning all round the Queen, and which soon would burst forth from the furnaces that concealed them.

It was in January 1564 that Jeanne quitted Pau for Paris. Despite ill-health and grief, and the oppression of a hundred cares, not the less oppressive because some were of her own choosing, some the punishment of her temperament, her courage was as high as ever. Throughout the southern provinces leagues had recently been formed for the defence of the faith.¹ These organisations were largely the response of the Catholics to the doings of the Queen of Navarre. The Cardinal d'Armagnac had led the way in this movement. But though the enthusiasm which it aroused made it evident that the public generally were bitterly hostile to such deeds as had of late made Lescar famous, Jeanne nevertheless proceeded northwards without any apparent fear for her personal safety.

When she reached the capital, the Court had departed on a tour of the provinces. Catharine's cure for the evils that attended the State was to distract men's minds with the glitter of Royal pageantry. The cure was now in full operation!

Jeanne tarried in the capital to lay before the Parlement of Paris a suit against the attack made by

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

the provincial legislatures upon her sovereign rights. This her lawyers managed so successfully that they obtained a decision in her favour, and the Queen of Navarre then set out for Maçon, where she was to join the Court.

Jeanne reached Maçon before her hosts, and there she allowed herself to be betrayed into a characteristic indiscretion. The town had a considerable Huguenot population. The arrival in their midst of so doughty a champion of their faith as Jeanne naturally excited amongst them great enthusiasm. The Queen should have exercised a moderating influence upon ebullitions that, in a mixed population, where feeling ran high, might very well lead to serious disturbance. The august traveller, however, far from shunning popular ovations, rather courted them, with the result that a messenger was sent on in advance by Catharine, who conveyed a severe rebuke to the imprudent Queen.

This unpleasant episode predoomed to failure Jeanne's visit to the Court. Even had she, however, been disposed to live in amity with her kindred, whose guest she was and whose favour she sought, the Huguenot populace made pleasant relations almost impossible. They appealed to Jeanne to make representations on their behalf to Catharine with regard to certain ordinances affecting their liberty. Jeanne was so ill-advised as to undertake this mission. Her appeal was refused, and the mortification was hers of having invited humiliation by a flagrant breach of the laws of hospitality.

Jeanne may well have feared, after these embarrassing events, that the special business which had

brought her to the Court stood small chance of success. One of the main objects of her visit was to obtain the Royal approval for the verdict registered in her favour by the Parlement of Paris, declaring her supreme and independent in her hereditary dominions. At Maçon this matter made no progress, and Jeanne, while awaiting the decision of the Queen-Regent and her Council, accompanied the Court to Lyons.

The gay and glittering assemblage included daughters of the noblest houses of France, young and beautiful damsels whose duty it was to make the Court a centre of elegance, of wit, and of gaiety, radiating over the whole land a softening and refining influence. Amongst these ladies was Isabelle de la Tour de Turenne, better known to history as Isabelle de Limeul. A cold wave of Puritanism was passing over France, the natural reaction following the licence of the previous reigns. This austerity, so foreign to the native temperament, would have had little interest for the Queen-Regent but that it came to be recognised as part of a politico-religious system which was more closely akin to Republicanism than to Monarchy as it existed in the sixteenth century. The Queen-Regent hoped to quicken in the hearts of the nation the old joy of life. To her the Puritans were frowning children, and, like an indulgent nurse, she would make them forget their serious, brooding thoughts. Beset with endless cares, her own vivacity was unailing. The progress of the years left her young in heart and almost youthful in appearance. Whatever censures her politics merited, her personal

character had many admirable traits. Her cares, her fears, were locked away in her private cabinet. In her drawing-room she laughed sweetly and often, while her happy repartee encouraged her whole circle to the free encounter of sparkling wit. The world was passing through an intellectual crisis, a revolution that was to alter the whole course of history, and Catharine thought she could check it by masquerades and balls and feasts and hunting-parties, in which the most dashing cavalier of all was the middle-aged Queen-Regent herself.

Up and down the provinces she went with her gorgeous train of great nobles and cavaliers and ladies, showing the people by example how to eclipse the ever-present tragedy of life. All this fever of gaiety, doubtless, amused the people, as the Court in its progress illuminated for a day or two the dark firmament of their lives. But when the pageant was over, the tragedy of drab days, of bitter memories, of disappointed hopes, remained. The meteor had left the sky darker than ever.

But Catharine's cavaliers and ladies, unconscious doubtless of the deeper motives that moved their Royal mistress, found life, as ordered by her, diverting enough. Catharine has been accused of having commissioned Louise de Rouet to ensnare Antoine de Bourbon, to render him harmless in politics by engaging him in another field. Antoine's character in such affairs was, however, notorious; and the chronicles of every Court relate the frailties of such belles as the fair Louise.

The same charge has been made against the

Queen-Regent respecting Louis de Condé. The Prince fell in love with Isabelle de Limeul and she with him, and Catharine has been blamed for a scandal which soon was the gossip of the land—a scandal to which Isabelle owes her place in the annals of her time.

Isabelle was the most beautiful of all the maids-of-honour; and Condé's eyes, it may be readily believed, hardly needed to be opened by any designing hand to the girl's attractions. Soon he was at her feet, and the Queen-Regent quickly discerned in his passion the opportunity for binding him to her interests.¹ Condé's wife, Eleanor de Roye, was a Huguenot, a lady of the House of Châtillon, who resembled Coligny in the austerity of her character and the constancy of her opinions. The dazzling Court had no fascination for her; and when her husband went there after the Treaty of Orleans, it was the place of all others most likely to bring all her pride and love and hopes to the dust.

Looking upon the attachment that the Prince had formed for the lovely girl whose chief and only business was her service, Catharine may well have conceived the idea that the influence of the austere Eleanor could be neutralised by this young girl whose views would be those of her Royal mistress, and none other. Moreover, Condé had secrets that were well worth knowing. He was the chief of his party. Not all of his lieutenants can have either admired his morals or trusted his discretion. But without his concurrence no important step could be

¹ Bayle.

taken, and the damsel who could draw from him the resolutions of his friends would stand high in the graces of her Majesty. Seeing the political possibilities of the situation, Catharine is said to have commanded the unfortunate girl to encourage the Prince's attentions, to omit nothing which could retain him in the bonds woven by her loveliness.

But Isabelle was not the only lady of the Court who cast languishing eyes upon the Bourbon chief. The widow of St. André was not averse to such diversion, and Condé's passion for Isabelle did not exclude a measure of devotion to the Maréchale.¹ The maid-of-honour was the fairest of the fair. But the widow was not without advantages over her younger and more attractive rival. She was very rich, and found the Prince in no wise unwilling to profit by her extraordinary liberality.

It was soon the gossip of the Court that Condé had accepted from the Maréchale the estate of St. Valeri; and Isabelle was driven to conclude that her radiant self, irresistible to all others, had been completely eclipsed in Condé's eyes by such commonplace things as a scheming widow and broad acres.

The girl's vanity was now her ruin. Catharine may have approved of such friendship or gallantry as would secure to the maid-of-honour a degree of influence over the Prince and the command of his secrets. She may even have contemplated a marriage between the two in the event of Eleanor de Roye being taken from a husband whose affections she no longer held. But that Catharine deliberately intended

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

to make the girl's honour the instrument of her political intrigues is not proven. If, however, she had had any share in exposing her to temptation, she soon had cause to reproach herself bitterly.

Jealousy of the *Maréchale de St. André* fanned into flame a passion that thus far had been kept within bounds. The woman with lands to endow a lover, and the girl with nothing but her charms and innocence, engaged in deadly strife for Condé's favour. In the end neither won. The widow lost her lands and her lover into the bargain, while Isabelle fell into public disgrace and was banished from the Court.

It was in the last week of May 1564 that the event happened which betrayed to the Queen-Regent and to the whole world the unhappy girl's folly. Condé's wife was at the time in ill-health ; her life was, indeed, despaired of. And the same year that saw her husband's treachery and Isabelle's frailty blazoned to the world, the proud, broken-hearted woman sank into the tomb.

The Court was on its way to Lyons, when the climax came which brought disgrace upon one of the noblest houses in the land. Jeanne d'Albret was therefore a witness of the commotion which ended in Isabelle's banishment.

To Jeanne's mind the affair could only have one explanation. Just as she blamed her enemies for Antoine's infidelity, so she would blame them for this scandal, which was felt by all serious Huguenots as a reflection upon the reputation of their Church. During the brief period of their domination in Orleans, serious lapses from morality had been punished in the

most exemplary manner. Yet here was Condé, their supreme chief, the husband of a great lady, one of themselves, a Châtillon, involved in immorality for which they would burn at the stake a humbler man. If to the general body of Huguenots it was a painful reminder of their dependence upon the ever-faithless Bourbons, to Jeanne it was more painful still as recalling her own humiliations through the agency of a brother-in-law whose princely rank and influence and soldierly qualities made him indispensable to her. Let them burn whom they would at the stake, the lacerated Jeanne ever kept a warm, a forgiving corner in her heart for this kinsman whose sins were almost an added bond between him and the memory of her own inconstant lord.

It was mid-July when the Court—to whom the whole affair was one for laughter—reached Lyons. While there, the decree made in her favour by the Parlement of Paris received the Royal approval. And before the close of the month, the tragic tidings reached Lyons that Eleanor de Roye had borne her last mortifications. The way was clear for Condé to go a-wooing with honour : his Princess was no more.

Jeanne's business at Court was concluded. She had come hither to have her rights vindicated. That had been done—and that was all. She had never emerged from the first shadows of the rebuke of Maçon. A river of ice had cut her off from all the laughter and sparkle of the Royal circle. She had forgotten the art of laughter, the art of life. And glad to escape from a society that was not of her world, she turned her face towards her home.

CHAPTER XVIII

A BEARNOIS SAVES THE QUEEN

JEANNE had chosen the sword. In one way or another the sword then it was to be, pursuing her always, until the bitter fight should end for her and the stormy petrel be at rest.

As she returned to her own land, entering, as it were, the dark and cold and menacing shadows, after the radiance in which she had of late lived, some feeling of despair may well have taken possession of Jeanne, some omen of final defeat may well have chilled her heart. She had seen that which must have convinced her, if she were open to conviction, that her party could never be masters in France; that she had staked her fortune and indeed her life upon a cause that, however well it might flourish in other lands, could never triumph here.

Once upon a time she had seen visions in which Catharine de' Medici was her partner, her ally. Together they would destroy the Papacy! But she had learned that visions were deceptive. Catharine would be nobody's ally, nobody's partner; her schemes were her own. They were already beginning to lay their impress upon the kingdom, and the result was remote indeed from the ideal set up by the Queen of Navarre in her own land.

In July Jeanne reached home. And very soon she was made acquainted with a peril that may well have daunted her, if she was any longer capable of such an emotion as fear.

By accident, a plot to kidnap her and carry her to Madrid was discovered by a countryman of Jeanne's, who took instant measures to baffle a design which would have placed her life and her kingdom at the mercy of her enemies!

The chroniclers do not accuse Catharine de' Medici of participation in this plot. Marshal de Montluc is, however, said to have been a party to it, and to have arranged to employ his troops in bringing it to a successful issue. The plan was a simple one. Swift action and a swift surprise were to settle everything. At the right moment Spanish troops were to swarm through the passes and effect a junction with Montluc's men. Then Jeanne was to be made a prisoner and the Lioness of the mountains was to be carried away into captivity, to conclude her tempestuous reign in the impenetrable seclusion, the oppressive peace of a State prison.

A fellow named Dimanche was the go-between in this affair. Montluc sent Dimanche across the mountains to the Duke of Alba, who in turn sent the emissary to Moncon, where Philip was at the time sojourning.

At Madrid Dimanche fell ill, and, being under the charge of a nobleman of Alba's suite, the sick man was assured of the best care that the Spanish capital could provide.

Dimanche grew worse, and, begging for the

attendance of one of his own countrymen, he was gratified with the services of one Vespier, of the household of the young Queen of Spain, who was doubtless very happy to bestow a favour upon a Frenchman in distress.

Dimanche, bereft of his senses by fever, let words escape him that filled Vespier with wonder and apprehension. He began to suspect that he had stumbled upon a mystery, and he applied himself to probing it to the depths.

As the patient became convalescent, sentiments of gratitude for the kindness lavished on him impelled him to hold out to Vespier vague hopes of an uncommon reward. A secret hinted at is a secret given away. It was so in this case. Gradually Dimanche unburdened himself of the whole truth, very proud, no doubt, to astonish his countryman with proof so overwhelming of his association with the highest affairs of State.

It so happened that Vespier, like Dimanche, was a native of Bearn. But while one was a fanatical enemy of the head of the House of Albret, the other retained in his exile a warm devotion to his early allegiance. He therefore strained every nerve to learn all that was to be known, and having obtained, as he believed, ample confirmation that Dimanche's boasts were well founded, he resolved to save from the hands of the Spaniards the unhappy woman for whom he still cherished the fealty that he had absorbed in his mother's arms.

To the Abbé St. Etienne, the devoted friend from her earliest years of the young Queen of Spain,

Vespier carried tidings of his discovery. It was a dangerous secret to be given utterance by the tongue of a *valet de chambre*. Such things were better left to greater folk. But still, he dare not keep silence, if by risking something he could check Alba and Montluc and secure the passes of his native mountains against a soldiery advancing to compass the final ruin of Navarre.

The Abbé St. Etienne may well have wished that his ear had been spared the honour of such a secret. But there was no escape from the responsibility thrust upon him, and he forthwith laid the whole story before his Royal mistress. Elizabeth's courage was fully equal to the emergency. She communicated what had been told her to Everard de St. Sulpice, the French Ambassador to Philip, begging of him to take means for the preservation of Jeanne.

Motives far more urgent than a desire to please Queen Elizabeth obliged St. Sulpice to obey her behests. He may well have doubted that Montluc or any other French officer was a party to the design. What he did fear was that in some way Philip would overreach his country, and, seizing the Queen of Navarre, seize too her territory and establish himself in a position that would be a continual menace to France.

Having taken his own measures to obtain such corroboration as was possible that some secret enterprise was afoot, he dispatched tidings of the affair to Catharine de' Medici, and at the same time sent Jeanne warning of her danger.

St. Sulpice's advice to Jeanne was to fly while yet

there was time to do so. But her heart forbade compliance. Moreover, she hoped that the first whisper of a Spanish invasion would rally to her banner wellnigh every fighting man in her dominions; that all differences of creed would be, at least temporarily, forgotten when menaced with the loss of their independence. The Huguenots, too, would hasten from far and near to support her with their swords. The chief danger that she had to guard against was a surprise. And against that Vespier and St. Etienne, Elizabeth and St. Sulpice, had amply secured her.

Jeanne retired to the fortress of Navarreins, and putting her defences into the best condition possible in the circumstances, she awaited the march of events beyond the Spanish frontier. Meanwhile, from her stronghold she wrote to Catharine de' Medici protesting against the outrage that had been planned against her, and asking for redress.

But Jeanne must have known full well that what she asked was beyond the power of Catharine to bestow. France, riven with dissension, beggared and bleeding as a result of wars, foreign and domestic, dare not challenge Spain. Catharine's answer was "that Huguenots had more than once been guilty of similar violent intents towards the King, their sovereign lord; and that the Queen of Navarre ought to follow the example his Majesty had set, of freely forgiving those injuries which it was out of his power to punish!"

As the year advanced Jeanne knew that the weather was an ally that would faithfully defend her against invasion by her warlike neighbour. She

therefore left Navarreins and returned to Pau, to keep Christmas in her ancestral castle.

It was a winter long remembered for its severity. Well might Jeanne rest easy in her castle at night, satisfied that her mountains were barred against every foe, for the snow lay deep in the passes, her faithful, her unpurchasable friend.

But it was not only in the mountain slopes that the snow lay in one great frozen mantle. The plains of Southern France were likewise clad in the same unaccustomed vesture. Inhospitable vesture! For Catharine de' Medici and her son and all the nobles and beauties of the French Court were in Languedoc, eager to dazzle the eyes of the provincials with splendid and continual festivals.

From Lyons, soon after Jeanne had taken leave of the Court, Catharine and her son and their magnificent train had gone to Dauphiné, then to Provence; and early in December they had entered Languedoc.

But snow or no snow, the Court could not long remain at rest. And so during the first weeks of 1565 it passed from Béziers to Narbonne, then to Carcassonne. The 31st of January it made its solemn entry into Toulouse. Many weeks were passed in this ancient town, where the young King addressed the local Parlement in a speech marked by the usual expressions of toleration, the spirit of which, however, never seemed to progress beyond the confines of the Court. After having sojourned for some time at Toulouse, the Royal procession proceeded to Bordeaux; and now the time was at

hand for one of the most memorable, the most mysterious, of Royal conferences. This was the celebrated meeting at Bayonne of Catharine de' Medici with her beloved daughter Elizabeth of Spain.

It was doubtless to obtain this meeting that Catharine had so long tarried in the south. She had probably hoped to meet Philip himself. But her son-in-law was too wary to risk a meeting in such troublous, such uncertain times, with one who could read in every expression of his countenance, in every inflexion of his voice, meanings hardly less plain than the words indicated on a parchment of State. If he avoided a subject, she would draw her conclusions just as surely as though he welcomed discussion. If he expressed opinions, his words would not be to her the only vehicle of his thoughts. Every subtlety and reservation hidden behind every pause and every nice discrimination in the choice of words would be visible to her intuition. Philip had no mind to submit his soul for inspection to such a mother-in-law.

There was indeed some difficulty in obtaining Philip's sanction at all for the meeting between mother and daughter. It was only after persevering efforts that St. Sulpice was able to write to Catharine informing her that the Queen of Spain, accompanied by the Duke of Alba, would keep the rendezvous at Bayonne.

The motives that led Catharine to Bayonne are as obscure as the actual business transacted there. Nor is it certain how the project of the conference came into being. It may be that Catharine, finding

herself near Spain, seized on the opportunity of seeing once more the beloved daughter who had left her in the first days of her widowhood. It may be, however, that the idea had long been in her mind; and that her tour up and down the country had served the double purpose of bringing her, without ostentation, to the desired goal, and of enabling her at the same time to study for herself the exact position of the Huguenots, their strength and influence, before discussing policy with Philip's representatives.

It is pretty certain that Catharine brought to the council-chamber full knowledge that the Huguenots were less powerful, from a military point of view, than some years before. She boasted to the Spaniards that it was so. There is some record, more or less authenticated, of the conversations that took place. But of the pact arrived at, if there was a pact, history contains nothing but surmises.

It was the 10th of January 1565 when the Court approached the Spanish frontier. Never, perhaps, even in France, had Royalty travelled with a more magnificent train. It was made up of close upon one thousand persons, great nobles and statesmen and generals with their suites, and in close attendance upon Catharine scores of maids-of-honour, Louises and Isabelles, whose only duty consisted in the cultivation of every art, the exercise of every grace, that could dazzle and charm.

Young Anjou, still a mere boy, but a boy of mettle, rode with his brother, King Charles. With her mother, the Queen-Regent, was delicious little

Marguerite of Valois, Jeanne's promised daughter-in-law, and in a few breathless years to wear her crown. The great Montpensier with a glittering retinue of his own swelled the cavalcade, as did other of the Royal Princes. But first in blood after Catharine's children was Henry, Prince of Bearn, riding in attendance on Charles, though his mother would gladly have had him far away from all the gay doings in which he should meet the Spaniards as friends and comrades.

No longer barefooted and clad only in a rough tunic, but a dashing and gorgeous young gallant, old beyond his twelve years, Henry's sparkling eye and buoyant air, above all his ready, fearless tongue, casting piquant words here and there, raising smiles or frowns, recalled to all who could remember the Louvre of earlier years the easy, bantering manner of the careless, thoughtless, fickle Antoine l'Échangeur.

"Elizabeth of the Peace," as Philip's bride was called, awaited the coming of her mother—not perhaps without a little trepidation, for though now a lady of nineteen (and nineteen was then mature), she had never quite overcome her timidity, her gracious reverence, in her wonderful parent's presence. Feelings less exalted may indeed have excited in the young Queen some uneasiness. She had come to meet her countrymen and women with anything but a splendid retinue, while she must have known that her mother's suite would be rich and dazzling and luxurious beyond anything perhaps that had ever before escorted a sovereign through even a kingdom so prodigal of splendour, so extravagant and generous,



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Clouet

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS (ABOUT 1557), CALLED QUEEN MARGOT

as her native land. France laughed at everything. That was her charm! And assuredly the belles from the Louvre would laugh at the Spanish ladies vested in their old robes, while all that was new and bright and gorgeous and novel was to be found in the wardrobes from Paris. But Elizabeth was very human, very simple, a Queen indeed if sweet simplicity be a regal grace. Let them laugh, so long as they loved her; and love her they did, every one!

Under the scorching sun of a Pyrenean summer's day the Queens met on the banks of the Marquère, while the troops mustered to do honour to the occasion thundered from cannon and arquebus a salute that awakened answering echoes in the valleys until the whole countryside reverberated with the welcome.

Anjou, with the flower of the nobility, had gone ahead to escort Elizabeth to her own.¹ Crossing the river to the Spanish side, the boy-Prince met his sister's party, and rode with her to St. Sebastian, she doubtless very proud of the lad who now acted as her cavalier and commander of her bodyguard, and whom she had last seen as a child of eight, when she had taken leave of her home to become Queen of Spain.

At St. Sebastian the Duke of Alba, with his suite, met the party, carrying the Order of the Golden Fleece for King Charles; and greetings having been exchanged between the mighty Duke and his Royal mistress and her young brother, they prepared to cross the river into the neighbouring territory.

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

But before they could do this, Catharine, throwing etiquette to the winds, in her eagerness to embrace her daughter, crossed to the Spanish side, and there, having gratified her long-cherished wish to behold lovely Elizabeth and clasp her once more in her arms, the two Queens entered the boat in waiting, and were ferried to the opposite bank, where the young King awaited them as stiff and stately as a boy of fourteen well drilled to regal ways could be.

The most brilliant feasts signalised the reunion of the Royal Family. France was on the verge of ruin, was indeed ruined for the moment. The most necessary expenses were met with difficulty or were not met at all. But immense sums were now squandered for no other purpose than to dazzle the Spaniards, and impress them with the wildest notions of the wealth and elegance and luxury and artistic riches of their neighbours.

The first delights of the meeting over, the principals got to business. A gallery communicated between Catharine's and Elizabeth's apartments, so that during the three weeks of the Royal stay there, mother and daughter were free to come and go at any hour of the day or night, without prying eyes being aware of their movements or the length of their conferences.

Jeanne watched these events with deep misgivings. If ever her heart misgave her, it was surely now. If France and Spain should unite to crush her, all was lost, for her valiant mountaineers could never hope to withstand the armies that could be launched against them by such an alliance.

Young Henry was her spy during these anxious days—and scant comfort could be deduced from his reports.

Once he loitered in the gallery when Alba and Catharine conversed, and heard Alba say that "the head of a salmon was worth more than all the frogs of a marsh!"¹

For these and other reasons the Huguenots began to fear that the conferences were directed towards bringing about a general massacre. This may be true or imaginary—in all probability the latter. But certain it is that the Huguenots henceforth lost all weight with Catharine: the Spanish influence was supreme.

The essence of that influence eludes definition. It amounted in all probability to a general agreement to take such steps as from time to time might seem expedient to defeat the Huguenots. No doubt Spain would gladly have led her beyond this; but for the moment it sufficed. Greater needs, more clear-cut circumstances, might at any time give rise to a clearer bargain. For such a contingency the ground was prepared, the seed sown at Bayonne.

As soon as the serious conversations began it was evident that Philip had gauged to a nicety Catharine's power and influence. The mistress of a great country, she could but accept his mandates, for France, riven asunder with factions, was not in her hands to be used for the exaction of such terms as might seem good. The great days of Francis had passed when French armies did contest for empire on every battlefield of

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

Europe with all the motley legions of Charles Quint. To-day, the only battlefield where Frenchmen found fame was on the plains of France, and the only laurels were those won in victory over their kindred.

Queen Elizabeth was timid of her mother. But she had to screw up her courage sufficiently to let her know that Philip was dissatisfied with her trimming policy. Philip knew not how to compromise; Catharine lived by compromise. The attempt to crush the Huguenots had brought France to the verge of absolute ruin. To tolerate them seemed equally ruinous. Either way the Queen-Regent turned there were perils deadly to herself and to her children.

The deeper problems of statecraft were left in Alba's hands. Elizabeth was not versed in the intricacies of her husband's plans. She, doubtless, could give her mother a general impression of his attitude towards France, what might be expected from him and what he expected in return. It was for Alba to arrange details, to bargain.

Catharine was soon able to appreciate her son-in-law's shrewdness in remaining away from Bayonne.

Once when Alba had spoken at some length on the situation in France, Catharine tried to penetrate his guard with a compliment.

"You diagnose the disease very well," she said; "I entreat you now to tell me the remedy."¹

"It is for you, Madame, to say what you desire to be done. I will undertake to transmit your wishes to my Royal master," replied Alba.

The Ambassador could always escape from a

¹ Edith Sichel, "The Later Years of Catharine de' Medici."

straight question by pleading that his master had not instructed him on the point. Had Philip himself come there, he would have enjoyed no such refuge from a woman's naïve demands.

Catharine retorted that Philip thoroughly understood her perplexities. She demanded a straight answer. What would Philip have her do?

Alba was not there to accommodate her with transparent candour. Her policy had hitherto failed. It needed strengthening.

Instantly she tried to turn this general statement into a definite one. Did he mean her to plunge again into civil strife?

To which Alba replied that the Huguenots should be banished from France.

Later Alba struck at l'Hôpital. He should be dismissed. Catharine found l'Hôpital the perfect instrument or perfect partner for the carrying out of her schemes. She maintained sturdily that they had been misinformed in Spain concerning her minister.

Alba maintained that the Chancellor was a Huguenot—a point of view to which Elizabeth, who was present on this occasion, lent some support.

But l'Hôpital was the one man in France indispensable to Catharine, the one man perhaps who ever understood this woman, who was to be a puzzle to her own generation and a deeper puzzle still to those that would follow her. With l'Hôpital she would not part.

Alba insisted that the laws against heresy should be revived, and that she should entrust the execution of them to the Holy Inquisition. This was a further

thrust at l'Hôpital, who would never consent to such extreme measures.

Catharine protested that her intention was the same as Philip's, only her methods were different.¹ She reminded him that at the time of the peace of Orleans the Huguenots were in possession of a great number of strong places, some of them planted in the very heart of their kingdom. That day there remained to them hardly one. Those towns where the population was mainly Huguenot, and which had been besieged in vain during the Civil War, were now overawed by citadels held by Royal troops. The terms of peace, which had been regarded by the Huguenots as a betrayal of their interests, had been still further diminished in value for them by the interpretation put by the Government upon various clauses. And as for the privileges that had been secured to them by the Treaty, and which were theirs beyond all doubt, public feeling sufficed to rob them of their value. They possessed the right to meet for worship in certain places; but if they underwent the hardship and expense of making the necessary journey to perform their devotions in the society of their brethren, they ran the risk of being murdered for their pains, while their murderers stood a good chance of going unpunished. Even if murder was not done, the insults of the populace were heaped upon these pilgrims, who thus possessed a charter of liberty that only mocked their misfortunes.

Catharine, according to this version of the conference, boasted that soon there would be no

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

Huguenots in France, for the reason that all cohesion was lost ; that all organisation was being dissolved, since synods could not be held nor contributions raised. Nor could they any longer trust their chiefs. The example that had been set in his day by the King of Navarre showed how easily they might be seduced from their allegiance. When the chiefs and nobles had been lulled into repose, then if the canaille should still retain their fanaticism, it would be easy to rid the soil of France of them.

Catharine's description of what her policy had accomplished, and what she hoped it would accomplish, did not impress Alba favourably. In Spain they did not convert princes and great men through the seductions of frail beauties ; nor did he believe in the efficacy of drenching the soil with the blood of the canaille.

"A prince," he said, "can do nothing more shameful than to permit people to live according to their conscience, thus introducing as many varieties of religion into a state as there are caprices in the head of man. . ."¹

Alba's remedy for all these caprices, all these fancies, for all the disorder and confusion, was fire and sword. Extirpate dissent from the roots ! Treat the evil with gentleness, and it would grow !

And that is about all that is known concerning the conference. Alba was for ruthless persecution ; Catharine was for milder, more insidious measures. Something no doubt was finally decided upon, though not necessarily a compact of extermination. But

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

whatever was agreed upon, it is certain that no harsh measures were resolved upon against Jeanne. Navarre was safe. Whatever the mother's errors, her little kingdom was to remain to her and to her children.

But Jeanne could not know this. On the contrary, she had the evidence of her son that salmon were more valuable than frogs, and assuredly she and her children belonged to the former category! Always suspicious of Catharine—who, however, never seemed disposed to press more harshly upon her than circumstances obliged her to—Jeanne must have put the worst construction upon the words overheard by the boy—words, however, that young Henry may have misunderstood, accustomed as he was to the patois of the mountains; or, hearing them correctly, they may have been capable of a very different application from that put upon them by his distracted mother.

Jeanne had never forgiven Catharine for her part in the tragedy that robbed her of her husband and made her humiliation and her weakness the talk of France, the laughing-stock of her enemies. Nor could she ever entirely escape from the notion that Catharine aimed at her total destruction.

Surveying the careers of both women, it would seem that some secret spring of sympathy was excited in Catharine by the misfortunes of Jeanne. Nor was the Medici so fanatical in her Catholicism as to be moved to repulsion by Jeanne's religion. Rather does the Italian seem to have regarded her zeal as a species of mania, which, considering her savage

environment, her cold and stern and warlike nature, might be partly forgiven. It was difficult to understand why Frenchmen like Condé, Coligny, Andelot, should want to be Calvinists. But in the heart of the Pyrenees, one expected to find even theology grim and rugged and uncompromising.

Meanwhile, all that which was visible to the eyes of Jeanne's friends at Bayonne was calculated only to repel and embitter their mistress. Jeanne's days were devoted to legislation, to concerting edicts for the advancement of her new faith, for the extirpation of Catholicism, for building stoutly an edifice that would survive. Such time as she could spare from this work so dear to her, but so prolific in misery and suffering for her subjects, was devoted to study, to consultation with her divines, and to the education of her daughter. To a woman of such a temperament the feasts, the ballets, the tournaments, the concerts, the balls, and masques which were in continual progress at Bayonne, were but a reminder of that life upon which she had long years before turned her back, that life from which Antoine's treachery and misfortunes, at home and abroad, had excluded her for ever.

But at length all the feastings and diversions and brave pageantry came to an end.

Once more should young Elizabeth take leave of her mother and brothers and return to the bondage of the Escorial, a great lady weighted heavily with cares of Empire—at nineteen! The King her lord had declined to buy her new dresses for her ladies to enable them to rival the French belles. It was

not for a tournament of beauty he had sent them thither. The men had ridden into the town on their mules and hacks, their baggage mounted before and behind them, and doubtless thus they rode away. A great train of ladies surrounded Elizabeth, who, mounted perhaps on the beautiful palfrey her brother the King had given her, with housings studded with pearls and precious stones, now beheld her kindred for the last time, and, setting out on her long journey, waved them a last fond adieu. She would never see them more. Already her days were numbered. And soon couriers would pass over these mountains and ford these streams, now dancing in the sunshine, to say to Catharine de' Medici that Elizabeth of Spain, the idol of her life, had laid down her crown, that the fair bond of her love, which had been the only true link between their two kingdoms, had been snapped asunder by the rude hand of death.

CHAPTER XIX

JEANNE CARRIES OFF HER SON

WHEN the conference of Bayonne was over and the French Court once more set out on its travels, the young Prince of Bearn turned his back again upon his mother's land and followed King Charles. The latter almost openly quarrelled with Jeanne before taking leave of her. As he had passed through her dominions he had beheld ancient churches empty and ruined, monasteries and convents untenanted! Enraged at these evidences of tyranny, he bitterly reproached his Royal aunt. But his reproaches left her unmoved. On one subject her mind was made up irrevocably. It was that in her little realm her will should be the supreme law, that her conscience should be the conscience of the people, that her faith was good enough for all. That same policy when pursued in Spain and France she denounced as the grossest tyranny. In Navarre it was true liberty!

Despite the young King's outburst, Jeanne seems to have avoided an open breach. It was always so, indeed, in her relations with the French Royal Family. Over and over again it seemed that the word had been spoken, the deed done, which would involve

an open rupture and very possibly war. But the end was always the same. Jeanne continued to enjoy something of the immunity from full responsibility that custom and a desire for peace generally award to a spoiled and wayward and domineering daughter of the house. And so Charles had scarcely taken leave of her, than Jeanne resolved to pay another visit to Paris. The Court might not like her ways; but to consult its tastes when her own interest and convenience invited her to do otherwise was a concession to etiquette that Jeanne would never dream of making.

The Cardinal de Bourbon had claimed lands ceded to Jeanne at her marriage with Antoine. Jeanne hastened to Paris to defend her rights and those of her son. She appealed for justice to the Parlement of Paris, and justice was promptly meted out to her. The Cardinal's claim was dismissed, and King Charles, despite his dislike of Jeanne's policy, at once confirmed their decision.

During her absence her kingdom was a prey to incessant commotions. In Lower Navarre the Catholics were not to be shaken in their devotion to their old faith. Faith and practice did not, however, always go hand in hand in the sixteenth century, and so serious were the depredations committed in Lower Navarre by a party of rebels that King Charles, at the request of Jeanne, sent troops to reduce the turbulent district to order. This mission was accomplished, with the assistance of the gallows for the ringleaders; and then the Huguenots of Bearn, by way of pressing home the advantage, sent a deputa-

tion all the way to Paris with a humble prayer to their Royal mistress, that she would be pleased to abolish the Catholic faith root and branch throughout her dominions. She was further petitioned to issue stringent laws against thieves, usurers, drunkards, gamblers, and tavern-keepers.

Jeanne readily fell in with this comprehensive scheme for making her kingdom an oasis in the desert where good men might rejoice in each other's happiness, all the happier that those outside the circle of the elect were being ground to the dust. She forbade by letters patent, issued in July 1566, the exercise of ecclesiastical patronage by Catholics. The benefices that lapsed were to be conferred by the Board she had set up some years before, which would, of course, take care that each new parson read the Gospel in the same light as his Royal mistress. The edict, however, would not stop at a mere provision for cutting off a supply of Catholic priests from the Catholic people. Measures were also taken to fill the Huguenot churches. It was ordained that all persons excommunicated by the Huguenot ministers should, after the lapse of a year, be deemed guilty of felony and their property forfeited unless they forthwith made their peace with the new spiritual powers and received absolution.

Jeanne no doubt found especial pleasure in drafting this edict in Paris. It was her reply to the thunders of Rome, to the menaces of Spain, to the secret machinations of Catharine. It was sweet for her to strike at Rome from her own capital of Pau, but sweeter still to launch the bolt from such a centre

of loyalty to the Holy See as Paris. If only she could have published such an edict in Madrid the cup of her joy would have been brimming over! Notwithstanding the severity of a decree which placed the property of all her subjects at the mercy of the parochial ministers, there was now no question of arresting Jeanne. In this Paris, where Catharine now reigned supreme, Jeanne was as safe as in her own distant home, safer far than she had been in the days when Antoine lived and was high in the Government, and, instead of being her protector, was her persecutor.

But though Catharine was too subtle, too plastic, too feminine perhaps, to adopt rough measures against Jeanne, she probably looked forward with some impatience to the day when the latter would elect to return to Navarre to superintend the wholesale excommunications and forfeitures which she had so lightly ordained.

When at last Jeanne did decide to leave Paris, she waited on King Charles and begged his permission that her son might accompany her to Vendôme, to be presented to his vassals. Charles readily accorded her Majesty so simple a favour, thinking perhaps that, in thus getting rid of this formidable aunt who was always in opposition to the Court, he was making rather a good bargain for a King who was only seventeen years old.

Charles was not such a fool as to suppose that young Henry could be permitted to retire permanently to Navarre, there to enjoy his mother's society and his own unfettered liberty. He was old enough to understand that the proper place for the heir of

Navarre was the safe custody of a French fortress, or the even safer custody of a Court where every pleasure that could hold youth in thrall made the days pass in one giddy whirl of amusement and delight. The King understood that Prince Henry, having renewed acquaintance with his vassals of Vendôme, would return to his gilded captivity at the Louvre. He had Jeanne's word that it should be so, and to Charles her word was as constant as night and day, for was she not a Queen, a Valois?

Poor Charles! When he told his mother what he had done, one of those storms of anger which at rare intervals mastered Catharine may well have burst upon the young King's devoted head. In youthful simplicity he had robbed her, robbed himself, of their trump card. It was true he had Jeanne's solemn word that Henry should return. But he did not know what his aunt's word was worth; his mother did. And in her heart she knew that if Henry once left the Court in his mother's custody, he would, with his mother's consent, return to it no more. She therefore overruled the King and forbade the departure of the Prince.

Jeanne now found herself threatened with the loss of a great prize, the failure of a scheme that would have made her largely independent of the French Court and mistress of her own destiny. At this critical juncture she seems to have displayed a degree of tact scarcely to have been expected from one usually so proud and headstrong. She instantly perceived the only road to success. It was to play off the King against his mother, the mother against the King.

She therefore abstained from arguing the point. The merits of the policy of holding her son as a hostage under the guise of a guest she carefully refrained from challenging. To have done so would have been to range all the politicians against her. She contented herself with reiterating that the King had granted her this favour. She did not suppose that his Majesty could break his word!

Jeanne's calculation was verified by events. The King, happily for her, was still young enough to regard his word as sacred, even though pledged without full deliberation and advice. To the boy it still seemed possible to be a King without ceasing to be a man of honour. He therefore insisted that Jeanne should have her way; Henry must accompany her. He would return—for surely a Queen, his aunt, could not deceive him!

At the last moment Catharine conveyed to Jeanne a polite hint that she was still dissatisfied, that she had grave doubts about the wisdom of what she regarded as her son's quixotic fancy.

"I rely implicitly upon your word, Madame," she said to Jeanne, "that the peace of France be not endangered by this concession."

"I entreat you, Madame," said Jeanne, "to be assured that I shall never fail in the devotion that I owe to the King my Sovereign Lord, and to yourself." And then Jeanne added a few words which doubtless gave Catharine food for serious and anxious reflection. "The peril of my House," she said, "could alone inspire me with altered sentiments."¹

¹ Freer's "Life."

With this veiled threat Jeanne took her leave and, accompanied by her son, set out for the south.

While Jeanne was at La Flèche, in Anjou, news reached her that her letters patent abolishing Catholicism had stirred up widespread disaffection, that even Bearn was on the verge of revolt. De Grammont was so alarmed at the threatening aspect of affairs that he declined the responsibility of enforcing the edict, and sent a messenger to Jeanne to explain the situation and to receive fresh instructions. Bad as was this news, it nevertheless had its advantageous side. It afforded her an excuse for hastening at once to her own dominions, and for carrying her son without more ado over the French frontier.

To Grammont she sent word that she was coming forthwith to Pau to resume the reins of government, and commanding him to hurry troops to meet her. She followed up these instructions by instantly taking to the road. Her inveterate enemy Montluc was, of course, still commanding the French forces in the southern district, and at a word from Paris he would make a dash to intercept her, and rob her of her son. But in Paris they were blissfully ignorant that the prize was fast slipping from them; that with the help of flying steeds and stout hearts young Henry would be beyond their reach in a few hours.

Jeanne's prompt resolution was rewarded with success. At the frontier she was met by her own loyal troops, and once more the heir to Navarre was safe amongst his own.

The homecoming was not, however, a happy one for her people. De Grammont's prudence in not

enforcing the tyrannical decree which confiscated not only church property, but the property of private individuals, was not imitated by Jeanne. She commanded the decree to be put in force, and gave fresh orders for the removal of statuary and the destruction of shrines. Conspiracies, rebellion, and bloodshed were the result.

Meanwhile the States of Lower Navarre and Foix were convened. They represented to the Queen that peace there could be none unless she withdrew the edicts which outraged the feelings of the overwhelming majority of her subjects. There were stormy passages between the Queen and the Parlement. They refused to transact their regular business unless she adopted their advice. She would listen to no advice. Her will, her conscience, her ideas of right and wrong were to be their only law. In the end they were dismissed, and, dispersing to their homes, resolved to take the field in defence of their rights against a tyranny so insensate that it seemed born of madness.

Some notion that she had set her hand to the impossible would indeed seem to have dawned on Jeanne at this time, for she issued another edict allowing the Catholics of Foix and Bearn to make open profession of their faith. But when the Bishop of Lescar asked her Majesty to return the sacred vessels that had been plundered from his cathedral, Jeanne's gracious reply was to organise a public sale of some of the stolen property. The remainder she sent to the mint and had coined into money to replenish the Treasury. As a further proof of toleration, she ordered the appropriation of all churches

deserted by the priesthood, which seemed an effective bar to their return.

During those days the gods had indeed driven Jeanne mad and had left her without a spark of discretion or of humour.

While she was thus busily engaged in destroying Catholicism, root and branch, in her own country, she took some interest in maintaining it elsewhere. Her interest was not inspired by any very exalted motive ; rather the contrary, for it concerned nothing less than the appointment of her husband's illegitimate son to a French bishopric. This boy's highest qualification for the vacant see was founded on the fact that his father, Antoine de Bourbon, had been a Prince of the Blood, while his mother, Louise de Rouet, had been more eminent for beauty than virtue. Jeanne now appealed to the King of France to make the offshoot of Bourbon, Bishop of Comminges. Her letter to Charles ran :

“ MONSEIGNEUR,—

“ I am bound by so many souvenirs of the honour which was mine during the life of Monseigneur the late King, my husband, that if I did not now employ every means in my power to aid and favour those who were dear to him, I should consider myself most culpable.

“ Monseigneur, I feel assurance, therefore, that you will not take in bad part (until you shall be pleased to grant me my just request), if I cease not to importune you for the bishopric of Comminges, the which having been bestowed upon the King my husband,

as an acknowledgment of his services, he was, in his turn, pleased to give to his bastard son. I pray you, therefore, Monseigneur, to consider whether it is a just act to deprive the said bastard of his bishopric, to bestow it upon the son of M. de Lansac?

“If it will please you, Monseigneur, to compare the dignity of the fathers of these two claimants, I feel certain you will perceive that, without doing us great wrong and injustice, you cannot bestow the benefice on the bastard of Lansac. I pray you very humbly, Monseigneur, to remember that the observance of your promise is a thing worthy of your Royal dignity. You have so many other ways of recompensing the said de Lansac, that, if it pleases you, both claimants may remain satisfied.

“I cannot, however, fail to inform you, Monseigneur, that in defiance of the edict of pacification between your Majesty and your subjects, the said bastard of Lansac has taken up arms in the diocese of Comminges, as I have been advertised by the Marquis de Villars. I have requested M. de Villars to explain to you that this violence may be the cause of sedition; to foment which the members of the Parlement of Toulouse, according to their usual custom, leave nothing undone, having already commenced their practices by sending the said bastard arms and artillery.

“I entreat you very humbly, Monseigneur, to chastise the audacity of the said de Lansac, and to acknowledge the patience and loyal endurance displayed by the bastard de Bourbon. If the latter was as headstrong as his competitor, he might have con-

trived more ways to punish his insolence than de Lansac has found means to act on his side ; but, Monseigneur, you will always perceive by our actions with what sincerity we offer you service. I therefore again tender you, Monseigneur, my righteous petition, while praying that God may augment and pour upon you His holy favours,

“Votre très humble, et très obéissante, servante et subjecte.”¹

Charles had apparently forgiven Jeanne's lapse of memory in failing to send back her son to Court ; or perhaps events had assumed once more so menacing a shape that it was deemed well to placate her. Antoine's son was, at any rate, given the vacant bishopric, and something in the nature of a halo of reflected sanctity henceforth softened Louise's early indiscretions.

Presumably Antoine's son took the revenues of the bishopric, and the revenues only, leaving to some humble ecclesiastic the duties of the mitre. It was the custom for King and nobles thus to dispose of their Church patronage for the benefit of favourites, worthy and unworthy. Jeanne herself having taken part in this intrigue for diverting the revenues of the diocese of Comminges to the family coffers, writes with much feeling on the corruption that has overtaken the Church to the Viscount of Gourdon as follows :

“The Church has not maintained her pristine innocence and vigour—her purity and holiness of doctrine and practice : she has exchanged the spiritual for the

¹ Freer's "Life."

carnal ; her roses are becoming thistles, her healing balms are venomous banes ; her charity is nought but chilling vanity ; her priests and bishops, who ought to be like Timotheus, chaste, sober, humble, hospitable, watching night and day to cherish the holy fire which glows in the bosom of every true priest of God, have defiled themselves, and have become abominable, by their avarice and most unholy sloth."

But soon Jeanne had other affairs to attend to, in which her judgment was shrewder, her courage more precious, more decisive.

In August 1567 word reached her that the peace which was no peace was ended ; that the Huguenots had again taken up arms.

The factions had never ceased, indeed, to make war upon each other, if minor skirmishes and occasional assassinations could be so designated. The root defect of Catharine's government was weakness, just as Jeanne's erred at the opposite extreme. The Queen-Mother's idea of controlling lawless grandees was to humour them. This policy was fatal at a time when the great feudal nobles kept up small armies, which had but to coalesce, to any large extent, to produce a force that could at any time plunge the country into civil war.

Sheer exhaustion had alone staved off for so long the evil day. Even Paris itself had not been free from commotions, due to the jealousies and animosities that ranged the great personages of the kingdom on opposing sides. The Marshal de Montmorency, eldest

son of the Constable, was suspected of a leaning towards the Huguenots. Once when the Cardinal de Lorraine entered Paris with an armed guard, the Marshal's men and his Eminence's escort nearly engaged in a pitched battle. The Marshal gladly remembered that the King had forbidden such a display of force by any subject. The Cardinal had, however, special permission under the great seal to maintain a body-guard.¹ This privilege was probably very well known to the Marshal; but the latter desired his Eminence to pay him the compliment of acquainting him with the fact that he was travelling with military state, and that he enjoyed the Royal sanction for doing so.

As the Cardinal, with his brother the Duke of Aumale and his nephew the young Duke of Guise, approached the capital, the Marshal prepared with his merry men to give them a warm welcome. The two forces met in the Rue de St. Denis, and the Lorrainers were scattered like chaff before the wind. The Cardinal himself and his nephew were glad to take refuge in a shop, and wait there until the storm had blown over and they could in safety venture out to the Hôtel de Clugni, the Cardinal's abode. For some days Paris was in a ferment. The two factions mustered all their strength in anticipation of a renewal of the combat, and it was only by the direct command of the King that the belligerents called a truce.

The Marshal and the Cardinal were officially reconciled, just as Guise and Condé had in other

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

days been made to embrace at the Royal word and command. But all these external evidences of peace, all the ceremonial professions of good-will, were symptoms of deadliest hate. Catholics and Huguenots were found together enjoying all the amenities of life; but each was none the less on his guard. Anything might happen at any moment—and sabres were always loose in their scabbards, daggers in their sheaths!

It was the misfortune of either side to have long memories. The Huguenots never forgot Vassy; the Guises never forgot the tragedy that had cut off the great Francis, mightiest captain of his age—a tragedy for which Coligny had been denounced as an accomplice by the fanatic who had done the deed.

The widow and children and mother of the Duke of Guise with a great mourning suite had gone to Court to demand vengeance on the assassins, of whom it was well known they regarded the Admiral as the most distinguished. Condé and the Marshal de Montmorency declared that they maintained his innocence against all. So violent were the passions aroused by this affair that any investigation seemed the certain signal for a renewal of the war.

The Admiral swore that he had had no hand or part in the murder, that he neither instigated nor consented to the crime. Then followed one of those ceremonial reconciliations that were so droll a feature of the politics of the day. Anne d'Este, the widowed Duchess, and her brother-in-law, the Cardinal de Lorraine, embraced the Admiral by the command of the King, and promises were exchanged that no

resentment would be cherished, that the past was buried in oblivion, buried in the tomb of Guise, in the earth with his assassin.

A personage of the first importance had, however, succeeded in obtaining leave to be absent from this mockery of a great act of self-sacrifice. The young Duke of Guise, a lad of sixteen, who had already done a campaign against the Turks, was not present to extend his forgiveness to the old Admiral, to pledge himself to forgetfulness; and he it was who should have done both if the oaths registered by the Royal decree were to have any permanent efficacy.

The Duke of Aumale, young Guise's uncle, was also absent from the scene. When later he appeared at Court, he was at no pains to conceal the fact that neither oaths nor embraces had made any difference in his sentiments towards the Châtillons. Far otherwise indeed, for his attitude towards the Admiral and his brother Andelot was openly provocative. Once more, therefore, the Court was agitated by strife that might any day lead to tragic doings within the palace itself.

Aumale was accused of hatching a plot to assassinate his enemies. The Duke's justification of himself, however convincing as proof of his innocence, was not of a nature to make the Admiral and Andelot feel secure as to the safety of their lives. He protested that his own trusty sword sufficed to avenge his wrongs. He had need of none other!¹

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

CHAPTER XX

THE STORM BURSTS AT MONCEAUX

CATHARINE was thus ever doomed to see her castles in the air dissolve almost as soon as she had completed their architecture. The peace which she had established had been shattered by Aumale's stubborn and rebellious spirit. The ghosts she had laid when widow and Admiral had embraced were all walking again. If she was to escape from the ever-present fear of slaughter in the Louvre, it was necessary to take some more stringent measures. She acted with unaccustomed courage, for she not only banished Aumale from Court but likewise the Châtillons.

The punishment of the latter was from every point of view a mistake. If their reconciliation with the widow had obliterated the past, then the person who had revived the feud was the only one who merited the Royal displeasure. The banishment of the Châtillons was therefore not only uncalled for in the interests of justice, it was likewise short-sighted policy, for it sent them into the solitude of the country, where, nursing their wrongs, they naturally turned, with renewed warmth and zeal, to the arms of their Huguenot friends whose support seemed

so necessary to sustain their influence. They could no longer remain blind to the bitter truth that the murder of Guise, far from destroying the power of his party, had in some degree given it a new lease of life ; for Catharine with the death of mighty Francis had ceased to fear his family. For the Cardinal de Lorraine she felt herself a match : his powers and his methods were within her own orbit. His ideas and his tastes led him to the practice of diplomacy. With the murdered Duke it had been different. With more than the Cardinal's gifts of imagination and of insight, he was also a great captain who, driven to extremities, would always place her at a disadvantage and reduce her to impotence by drawing the sword. The Cardinal, therefore, found himself more powerful, if anything, as a result of the bullet that had sped in the darkness to his brother's bosom, the magic which was to have made the Huguenots free of the air of France !

It was bad enough for Catharine when great men carried their feuds up to Paris, frowned upon one another in the Royal presence, and muttered imprecations in their beards. But now that the Court was rid of these turbulent nobles, and feasts and diversions succeeded each other in orderly routine, there was even greater reason for anxiety ; for the authors of confusion in the State were scattered far and wide, stirring up sedition and, without check or hindrance, organising forces which some day would explode, exacting from the Court a heavy price for its brief period of unclouded gaiety.

Day by day the situation in the provinces went

from bad to worse. Where the Catholics were the stronger faction, the Huguenots were persecuted ; where the Huguenots were the more powerful, no other religion was tolerated. Here and there collisions took place between the more intolerant spirits. Towns lay down to rest in fancied security, and woke to find an enemy within their gates. The châteaux, which in normal times were the quiet homes of nobles and their families, had now become fortresses where the warders were ever on the look-out for some surprise, and if they slept, did so at their peril. The dagger and the pistol were also at work, as the fanatic, turned assassin, busied himself righting in his own way the wrongs of his party. Security for gentle and simple, for the greatest or the humblest, there was none. All the signs and omens pointed, indeed, to the dissolution of France.

The clouds gathering over the land appeared in dark masses at Pamiers. This place was one of those in which, by the Edict of Amboise, freedom of worship was granted to the Huguenots. The spirit of toleration, never very robust, was now altogether extinct, and an attempt was made to interdict this privilege. The Huguenots replied with armed resistance. Battles were fought day after day, and one commotion succeeded another. For some weeks the disorders continued, and then, on the 5th of August 1566, the Catholics were completely worsted and driven from the town. This victory was followed up by the pillage of the churches and convents. When these tidings reached the neighbouring town of Foix, the Catholics attacked the

Huguenots and after much bloodshed drove them to the mountains. By order of the Queen-Regent, the Parlement of Toulouse inquired into the affair. All the Catholics were acquitted and the rest were found guilty.¹ More than ever it seemed to the Huguenots that the sword was the only remedy for their ills.

The events that had occurred at Pamiers and Foix were repeated elsewhere—that is to say, there was violence on both sides. But everywhere the Huguenots were punished, while their adversaries escaped with impunity. D'Armagnac, Jeanne's old adversary, drove the Huguenots out of Avignon, and the refugees, dispersing over the neighbouring provinces, found themselves objects of suspicion to the local governors. Well indeed they might be, for they were doubtless apostles of sedition amongst their co-religionists, whose sympathies were touched and passions aroused by such tales as men can tell with the simple eloquence of truth, when they are themselves with those they love the heroes of their narratives.

The Huguenots began to say one to another that their total destruction was in contemplation. Gossip is never a truthful reporter; and in those days, when there was no other vehicle of news for the common people save hearsay, what happened at a distance was mentally coloured by the animosities and prejudices and the wishes of those who spoke of such events. Lies and exaggeration had long since been discovered to be powerful political weapons, and in the sixteenth century lies and exaggeration were employed to an extent that had perhaps never before

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

been approached. Thus it came to pass that though the Huguenots had plenty of cause for apprehension, their dangers were almost inevitably exaggerated, owing to the atmosphere of suspicion, of lying, of cruelty, and of ignorance which enveloped the land. Men said that Catharine was now in more frequent communication than ever with Philip, and how could there be peace in France if the policy of the Queen-Regent was inspired from Madrid?

"I would prefer to have no subjects rather than reign over heretics," was one of the liberal professions attributed to Philip. What if that sentiment should be accepted at the Louvre, and the unity of the kingdom restored at a blow before the widely scattered Huguenots could take the field and die, if die they should, fighting for life and liberty! Some such reflections as these, expressed in a thousand forms, and coloured with ten thousand, more or less, horrible possibilities, according to the fears of the individual or the family, must at this time have wrought the Huguenot population to a high pitch of terror and expectancy. In a word, everything was taking such a shape as to incite a general conflagration.

Philip entrusted the Duke of Alba with the task of extirpating heresy in the Low Countries. Alba assembled his army in Italy, and Philip appealed to Catharine for permission that he might march through French territory to the theatre of his new command, thus striking terror to the hearts of her Huguenot subjects as well as offering a swift and easy route thither. Catharine was too shrewd to entertain a proposal that would have united all

Frenchmen against her, and might very well result in her own downfall and exile. She therefore privately begged Philip not to urge a course which seemed to her impolitic, while in the council, to which Condé and the Châtillons were called, she made the march of Alba an excuse for raising an army for the defence of the frontiers. Catharine, in effect, played the part of French patriot so impressively, burning with ardour for the preservation of her adopted country against the dangers of Spanish aggression, that the Huguenot chiefs applauded her spirit and cordially approved of her policy.

Perhaps the Huguenot chiefs were no more transparent than the Queen. But quickly a change came over the scene. The unanimity of the council and of the opposing chiefs was short-lived. Soon suspicion had grown deeper, prejudice more bitter than ever. It was discovered that Catharine had succoured the Spanish army during their march under Alba to Flanders! This discovery shook to its foundation the rather flimsy structure of the new rapprochement between Condé and his friends on the one side and the Queen-Regent on the other. After this the chasm grew rapidly wider.

The Protestant Princes of Germany sent an embassy into France to hold conference with the Huguenot chiefs. There were conversations with Condé and Coligny, and then the Germans demanded audience of the King, whom they besought to grant complete toleration to the Huguenots, as the price of a continuance of the friendship which the Princes had hitherto extended to his Majesty.

Charles was now in his seventeenth year. A King from his tenderest years, he had already mastered all the regal arts that came without deep thought or study. We have seen that he held his word sacred. He was apt, however, to garnish it with round oaths, such as would have established his reputation as a soldier had Fate called him to the camp instead of to the Louvre. Surrounded all his life by men of haughty and imperious temper, no wonder the boy deemed anger a sign of strength and courage and manliness, which on occasion he made no effort to restrain. The Germans were now to taste the quality of this undisciplined youngster, whose wrath was at boiling-point because of their traffic with Condé before paying their respects to the Throne.

Indeed, had their observation of the laws of etiquette been exemplary, their mission was such as to justify a reception tinged with diplomatic hauteur. But Charles did not trouble to be diplomatic. He told them bluntly that their masters would be better employed in practising than in preaching toleration. Why did they not allow the Mass to be celebrated in their States? Why were Catholic priests forbidden to preach in their cities? Then he dismissed them, and Catharine, true to her policy of giving away wounds and salves with the same ready hand, showered presents upon the crestfallen visitors.

Charles, doubtless, held the Huguenot chiefs to blame for the slight that had been put upon the Crown by the procedure of the Germans. A little later there was a somewhat heated discussion at Court between the Constable and his nephew the Admiral,

on the subject of religion. The Constable's tongue was always harsh and unrestrained, nor was it in the least mellowed or curbed by advancing years. His ardour did not, however, satisfy the young King, who also joined in the debate.

"You first demand a little indulgence," he cried, turning to Coligny; "to-day you want to be our equals. Very soon you will want to be our masters, and drive us from the kingdom."¹

Coligny knew when to hold his tongue. It was not for him to argue with the King, albeit he was a grizzled old veteran and a statesman who could have read this beardless boy some lessons worth hearkening to. But those who saw the clouds sweep across his war-worn brow knew full well that the King's wrathful words had sunk deep into his heart; that the most dangerous, the most accomplished of the Huguenot chiefs would not readily forget those bitter reproaches that might have been spared his grey hairs and that should perforce be borne in silence. But his silence did not soothe the King, whose ungovernable rage would seem to indicate that the troubles of his reign had imposed an unendurable strain upon the brain of one whose physical and mental parts were too feeble for his lot.

"The Duke of Alba was right," he cried, flinging into his mother's presence, where in the adjoining apartment she was engaged with the Chancellor l'Hôpital, "that these people carried their heads too high; and that it was not by subtlety, but by vigour and force, that they should be crushed!"

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

Meanwhile, Catharine, acting upon the authority given her by the Council, had raised six thousand Swiss and had taken other measures, as it was explained, for the defence of the frontiers.

The Huguenots, however, were not deceived. Charles had shown his hand, his mother's hand, with the recklessness of youth. They believed that their ruin was impending, that Catharine, now as they feared the mere creature of Spain, would destroy them with her mercenaries.

During the summer of 1567 the Huguenot chiefs were deep in conference first at Châtillon, Coligny's home, then at Valeri, the residence of Condé. They were agreed that from Catharine they could no longer hope for anything; that the sentiments of the young King were as hostile as those of Philip himself. Still, Coligny was opposed to extreme measures. His policy was patience; to permit the Medici and her son to destroy themselves by drifting into a course of persecution which would outrage every sentiment of chivalry and humanity, and make the natural generosity of a brave and impulsive race the ruin of the Valois and the salvation of the Huguenots.

Coligny's influence, if not his reasoning, prevailed over the appeals of his more impetuous if less far-seeing friends. Then suddenly an alarm was raised that changed the whole situation. An official of the Court is said to have warned Coligny that he and Condé were to be arrested; that the former was to perish, the latter to be imprisoned. As usual in this labyrinth of lying, of dark deeds, of exaggerated and often baseless gossip, it is impossible to say what

foundation there was for this rumour, which, if acted upon, would have left the Huguenot body without a military head of established renown. But this was not all. They were further informed that the Swiss mercenaries, instead of being quartered on the frontier, were to be marched into the heart of the country and employed to garrison the chief Huguenot towns ; and that the ancient laws against heresy were to be revived in all their pitiless severity. Instantly, on the advice of Andelot, the bravest of all, they resolved to die, if die they should, with arms in their hands.

They concerted a plan to seize the King, to expel the Cardinal de Lorraine, and overwhelm the Swiss before they should have obtained possession of the citadels !

And what then ! Charles a prisoner, Catharine a prisoner, the Huguenots everywhere triumphant, the Crown of France would naturally be theirs to dispose of at their pleasure. And in the hour of victory, assuredly they would remember that the first Prince of the House of Bourbon was young Henry of Navarre, who, with his mother, watched from their mountain fastnesses the progress of a game in which all who had aught to lose played for their all ! Not that they would willingly destroy Charles and his mother !—rather did they desire to employ the Royal authority as a cloak for their measures, and so perplex the nation that they would be able to pass for the real upholders of the Crown against its enemies. But if this mask of legality should fail them, if Valois and Medici should go once and for all, then Jeanne's son was the candidate without rival for the vacant throne.

The Court was at Monceaux. The chiefs of the Huguenots determined to win the great prize at a blow. They would surround Monceaux and seize his Majesty.

On the Feast of St. Michael a chapter of the Knights of that Order was assembled at the Royal château.¹ While Charles sat with his knights the blow was to fall. For this purpose Condé, Coligny, Andelot, and the Count of Rochefoucauld had seized Rosoy-en-Brie on the 28th of September 1567, the little army numbering some four hundred gentlemen. But the Queen heard in time of the treachery afoot and quickly transferred the Court to Meaux, whither the Swiss quartered in the neighbouring villages were drafted by forced marches.

Meanwhile the Court was agitated with the question what to do in this unexpected emergency. The old Constable was all for standing firm at Meaux, so was the Chancellor. But the Cardinal de Lorraine was for an immediate retreat to Paris. That advice was adopted, and in the small hours the King and his mother set out for the capital with the Swiss forming a solid phalanx around them. They had advanced three or four leagues when they suddenly found the way was barred by Condé and his horsemen.

The Prince called a halt. He wished to speak to the King. But that could not be. These Swiss warriors were there to form an impassable rampart round his Majesty, and while life was theirs they would not betray their salt.

From words, Condé fell to deeds, and with his

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

squadron charged full at the mercenaries. But like a granite wall they received the impact. A few men fell, but the Swiss had men to spare. The gaps were filled and all was ready for another shock.

While horse and foot contended in this unequal fight, the Constable sent the King forward by a circuitous route, escorted by only two hundred horsemen. As usual when a fight was in progress, Condé was too deeply engaged in the combat to note what was passing around him, and while the Huguenots wasted their time in a vain but gallant effort to penetrate the ranks of the Swiss and reach their Sovereign, Charles was in reality far away, well on the road to Paris. The great plan had failed. The King had slipped through their very arms.

Such in brief was the succession of events which led to a renewal of the Civil War. In some of these events Jeanne had been a participator. She was actually in Paris at the time of the reconciliation of the Guises with Coligny and Andelot, and had not yet set out for the south with her son when the haughty Aumale fanned into fresh life the smouldering embers of passion. She was of course a near neighbour of Armagnac, who, as Legate, had his residence at Avignon, and her tyrannical edicts against her Catholic people may have been intended to some extent as a reply to his measures against the Huguenots.

In August 1567, at a time when she must have been well aware of the near approach of the crisis, she left Pau to visit her county of Foix, accompanied by her son. She went into residence at St. Gaudens,

and there from day to day she doubtless watched anxiously for the arrival of a courier who would tell her that the torch had been lighted that was to kindle the fires of war in every quarter of the distracted land.

At last the courier came, and at St. Gaudens every eye was brimful of anxiety to know the precious secret with which he had ridden fast and far.

Well may Jeanne have railed at Fate, and at Condé too, as the messenger unfolded his tale. He told her, we may presume, of the success with which the little Huguenot force had been mobilised under the very walls of Monceaux, and how the secret had been betrayed, with the result that the Swiss had been hurried up at the eleventh hour, and the plan for kidnapping the King, without striking a blow, frustrated.

Jeanne may well have anathematised the tongue whose whisper had thus marred the plot which, if successful, had placed the kingdom, to all seeming, at the mercy of her friends.

The messenger also doubtless told her of Condé's engagement with the valiant Swiss; and of the simple ruse by which the King had escaped—a ruse which would have left him at the mercy of the Huguenots had Condé thrown out scouts to watch the avenues by which the prize could elude him.

Jeanne decided to return at once to Pau, but before doing so she wrote to her old enemy Montluc a letter which shows that, despite her high and stubborn spirit, she could still practise some of the arts of the Medici.

"As I was on my road," she wrote, "for the county of Foix, there to hold the States, and to visit my subjects under the suzerainty of the King my Sovereign Lord, I heard, when at St. Gaudens, that in various parts of the realm there were assemblies of the disaffected in arms, for which reason I have resolved to return to Pau. I am now on my way thither, being firmly resolved still to hold and maintain my countries and subjects in that peace and tranquillity which, by the grace of God, I have hitherto been enabled to do, despite the troubles that have prevailed around me ; being, likewise, firmly minded to spare nothing in my power to render his Majesty service."

The "assemblies of the disaffected" were of course her friends who had failed to kidnap King Charles—the King to render service to whom she would spare nothing !

Nor was Jeanne's naïve resolve to maintain peace in her own dominions hardly less ingenuous than her allusion to the troubles in France. Navarre was seething with discontent. The Baron of Luxe, one of her wealthiest and most powerful nobles, had boldly resorted to arms in defence of the liberty which Jeanne had so grievously assailed. The baron had taken to the mountains with his guerilla warriors, and well she knew that no power on earth could subdue him while the friendly hinterland of Spain offered him an easy refuge.

CHAPTER XXI

JEANNE PUTS HER CROWN IN PLEDGE TO FORTUNE

THE rising of the Huguenots had taken the Court, and indeed the country, by surprise. The King reached Paris in a frenzy of rage at the outrage of which he had been the victim—rage that was the more difficult to appease as he owed his safety not to his sword, but to the fleetness of his charger.

Meanwhile the Huguenots pressed on with their warlike measures. Condé and Coligny marched towards Paris, and, on the 2nd of October 1567, seized St. Denis, where, with no more than two thousand men under their command, they prepared to lay siege to the capital.

In Paris the Constable had more than six thousand men at his disposal; but instead of marching out to St. Denis and putting everything to the issue of the sword, the old man waited to negotiate.

In Paris people said it was shameful that a mouse should thus besiege an elephant. But the elephant had no real cause for shame. It was a certain tenderness for the mouse that held him back from using against his puny enemy the strength that would eventually crush him to the dust.

Montmorency had a warm corner in his brazen heart for his nephew of Châtillon. He could never quite bow to the stern truth that Coligny was separated from him in religion and politics by an impassable chasm; and he hoped even now to find a bridge across which his nephews could retreat from their dangerous, their ruinous plight.

Catharine, like Montmorency, though for different reasons, was ready to forget—for the time, at all events—the high treason of Monceaux. She would practise her strange Machiavellian arts on the enemy even when he came armed from head to heel with a drawn sword in his gloved hand.

Negotiations were therefore opened between Paris and St. Denis. The Huguenots adopted a high tone. They demanded the dismissal of the Swiss and complete liberty of conscience. The first condition was not to be thought of. The second was impossible, considering the temper of the times. There was a third demand, which seemed designed not only to invite failure, but to intensify bitterness. It was required that all Italians should be dismissed from Court, and with them should doubtless go the greatest woman in France, the most famous Italian of all, the redoubtable Catharine herself!

The insult stung the Queen to the quick. Her reply was a call to unconditional surrender. This warlike message from one who dreaded war had a sobering influence on the rebel chiefs. They sent in a new petition asking for liberty of worship. Montmorency, meanwhile, essayed to smooth matters by private correspondence with the Châtillons. He

pointed out to Coligny that the King dare not grant what was demanded; that if concessions were made, they could be but temporary; that at an opportune moment they would all be withdrawn!

The veteran's naïve diplomacy was the one thing wanted to urge Coligny to desperate measures. The logic of the sword should decide the issue.

The delay in taking decisive action had multiplied the difficulties of the situation. October was now far advanced, and during the weeks wasted in fruitless negotiations, the little force that had reached St. Denis two thousand strong had grown to an army of six thousand men. The Royal forces had luckily increased proportionately, so that the Constable had at his disposal eighteen thousand men. Had he given battle two weeks earlier, the engagement would have been a small affair, resulting in certain and overwhelming victory for the Royal troops. The Huguenots gathering in the provinces would consequently have had no organised army around which to rally. The scattered units could easily have been vanquished one by one, and the Royal authority would have been vindicated with completeness and vigour, and with far less bloodshed than was now inevitable.

On the 10th of November the Constable led the garrison of Paris against the besiegers.

To the complaints of the citizens of Paris that he had sacrificed their interests to the safety of his nephews, Montmorency replied that the day would see him dead or victorious. Death it was to be!

Stung to madness by the imputations of his own

side, and still more perhaps by the obstinacy of the kinsmen whom he loved in his own dogged fashion, the old Constable threw himself into the fray with the ardour of a stripling.

The Huguenots fought with consummate bravery, consummate recklessness. The tide of victory flowed hither and thither. The force under the Constable's immediate command was routed, and he was left almost alone. Wounded as he was, five times over, the aged warrior still held his ground with supreme valour, doing all that general, all that cavalier could do, for his Royal master. The sixth wound was to be his last. A Scot, one Robert Stuart, called on him to surrender. But the Constable was out for victory. As a victor he would ride from the field, or die there; and his response was a smashing blow with his great sword-hilt in the teeth of the Scot. Vengeance for the angry blow was swift. Another Scot, at his heels, heard the request and saw the reply, and, drawing a pistol, let fly at the Constable's back. This was the end of the famed Montmorency's career. Some monitor within his soul had warned him to avoid the battlefield. But Paris, and indeed Fate, would not have it so; and with a proud boast, a brave boast that was indeed half a prophecy, he had gone to his doom.

He was carried from the field by Damville his son, and the Duke of Aumale. With unquenchable fire he desired to die where he had fallen. But his friends would not have it so, and, a dying man, he now re-entered Paris to spend there his last hours.

Not even the cold breath of approaching death

could subdue his arrogant spirit and restrain the rude tongue that was the dread of friend and foe. A priest came to his bedside to help him to make his peace with his Creator. But even in this supreme affair he would dictate the way. Under the priest's exhortations he grew impatient.

"I have not," he said, "lived for eighty years without having learned how to die in a quarter of an hour!"¹

On the 11th of November, the day after the battle of St. Denis, Anne de Montmorency closed his eyes for ever. He had lived long enough to know that his last battle was a victory for the King his master.

It was a victory, however, that was only one degree less expensive than a defeat. The Royal forces had lost numerous gentlemen of mark; while the Huguenots, despite heavy losses, had fought with a reckless valour that elicited from the Turkish Ambassador, who was a spectator of the battle, the encomium that with such troops his master would conquer the world.

The Queen of England and the Protestant princes of Germany had no mind to allow the flames of civil war to languish in France, if men and money from foreign countries could keep them alive. Men and money were forwarded to Condé by Elizabeth of England, the Marquess of Brandenburg, and the Elector-Palatine, whose son Duke John Casimir was ready to march six thousand men to the assistance of the Huguenot chiefs.

Catharine, alarmed at the prospect of an inter-

¹ Mézeray, "Abrégé Chron."

national league against her, sent envoys hither and thither representing to the Catholic princes her difficulties. In reply to Castelnau, whom she dispatched to Brussels, the Duke of Alba offered to march an army into the heart of France. So desperate a remedy for his mistress's griefs Castelnau had no power to accept. Nor had Catharine any mind to raise up a new enemy to her Government on the ruins of the old. Her hope, doubtless, was that Alba would divert the threatened incursion from Germany, so as to leave her unhampered in dealing with the rebels.

Meanwhile, the method which she chose of re-establishing the King's authority was to temporise with his enemies, notwithstanding that the Huguenots, in the provincial centres where they had gained the upper hand, were wreaking a terrible vengeance upon the Catholic population. The negotiations were concluded at Longjumeau, and on the 2nd of March 1568 the articles of peace were signed. John Casimir's troops were paid by the Queen and sent back to Germany, and some of the Huguenot garrisons surrendered.

From the Court of Paris la Mothe Fénelon was dispatched to Pau, to try to establish peace in Navarre, where the rebels, led by the Baron of Luxe, still defied Jeanne's authority. Catharine doubtless believed that the restoration of peace in Navarre would lead to a general acceptance of the Treaty of Longjumeau; for the Huguenots as a whole, far from having done so, were still in arms in Rochelle and other places in the south. The rebels in those

places awaited securities for the due fulfilment of the treaty. "Oaths and promises have," they said, "availed nothing in the past." Were they, once again, to sacrifice all they had gained in return for the same evanescent pledges!

Peace in Navarre can hardly, however, have presented the same prospects to Jeanne as to Catharine. If the latter hoped that such a consummation would have a salutary influence on her son's rebel subjects, Jeanne doubtless hoped that a settlement with the Baron of Luxe and his followers would untie her hands and leave her free, to some extent, to take a commanding part in the disputes that raged in France—disputes that no treaties, no reconciliations, could at this juncture altogether eliminate.

To Fénelon's mission Jeanne listened graciously, seemingly as anxious to forgive as Luxe could be to obtain forgiveness.

"She never had other intent," she said, "than to vindicate her sovereign rights, and to teach her subjects the duty they owed to their Queen. If, therefore, the rebel barons wished to obtain the pardon they had before contumaciously rejected, they must personally implore her clemency."

The rebels therefore laid down their arms, and the leaders, including Luxe, Moinems, Damesan, and Eschaux, came to Pau to make submission in person and beg their Sovereign's pardon.

Mistress of a sharp tongue as well as of a ready pen, the penitent nobles had to endure a lengthy rebuke.

"Messieurs," she said, "bad subjects like your-

selves, traitors to their Sovereign and to their country, can no longer be addressed by the title of noblesse. Such persons as yourselves are unworthy of honour, for you are traitors whose crimes scarcely admit of expiation in the sight of God or in that of man. Nevertheless, He, Who orders all things according to His holy pleasure to enhance His glory, having rescued me from past dangers, He teaches me to exercise clemency even in respect to such as yourselves, who have now assured me of your repentance for the past, and of your desire, penetrated by a just horror of your crimes, to live from henceforth so blameless a life that the very memory of your late detestable conspiracy may be effaced from the mind of man.

“Go, messieurs! I forgive the past, in consideration of the contrition you have so humbly expressed, and in the firm trust that the great clemency which I this day show towards you may in time produce a result worthy of faithful and loyal subjects. May God grant this my prayer!”¹

So far Catharine had gained her point: there was peace in Navarre. Still Rochelle was a maritime stronghold in the hands of the enemy, and Catharine decided that the next step should be for Jeanne to come to Paris and negotiate with her a peace which would meet with that general approval from the Huguenots which was withheld from the Treaty of Longjumeau. Fénelon was entrusted with the delicate task of inducing Jeanne to undertake this perilous mission. Jeanne, however, was not to be

¹ Freer's "Life."

lured north. Like the men of Rochelle, she had no confidence in the permanence of the bargain made at Longjumeau. She, however, sent an envoy to Paris, who was deputed to put her views as to what was necessary for the peace of France before Catharine. Jeanne's proposals amounted to nothing more than that the King should give generous effect to the concessions that had already been made on paper at a time when Huguenot arms had enabled Condé to dictate his own terms. L'Hôpital urged the King to adopt Jeanne's policy. But Charles was in no tractable mood, and the Chancellor was dismissed for his pains.

Catharine seems to have concurred in the Chancellor's disgrace. It seemed to the Queen that they had arrived at the parting of the ways; that things could never be better until they were much worse; that l'Hôpital's genius for trimming and tacking and compromise could no longer serve her.

The Queen, at this time, seems to have scarcely known what to do. Yet a certain thread of consistency flimsy though it be, runs through her career from beginning to end. Now more than ever her true purpose began to be apparent. She always preferred peace to the sword, and if she could have contrived it, she would have conceded toleration to the Huguenots since their reunion with the Catholics had been demonstrated to be impossible. But forces within and without the kingdom were too strong for her.

To the Venetian Ambassador she said "she knew that by the peace she had concluded, she had incurred the censure of the other Catholic sovereigns, to such

Jeanne Puts her Crown in Pledge to Fortune 257

degree that several raised doubts as to her faith ; but that, easy in her conscience, she awaited her justification at the hands of God, . . . that one day the purity of her soul and the rectitude of her desires would be recognised."

In these words there is a note that rings sincere ; and they probably convey perfectly the essence of Catharine's feelings and policy at this time. That is to say that she had utterly failed to effect a compromise under which the two parties could or would live in amity ; and the only resource left to her was to ensure as best she could that the King's party should be rendered paramount.

To the Marshal de Tavannes she confessed "that the peace was made, after the example of Louis XI., to separate their enemies ; the Queen thinking it just that she should trap those who had failed to take her at Meaux."

Tavannes was at the time Governor of Burgundy, and to him she sent word to arrest the Huguenot chiefs who were in residence at Condé's château at Noyers. At the same time troops were poured into the district to close every avenue of escape from the château, where the drama that had failed at Monceaux was now to be re-enacted, with the chief parts reversed and with the same ultimate result.

The duty entrusted to Tavannes was not to his palate. If Condé and the others were to be arrested, there should, he held, be first an open declaration of war. He therefore took measures to defeat the Queen's mandate without compromising his fidelity. Condé was known, far and wide, by the sobriquet

of "le Cerf." The Marshal caused a warning of his peril to be conveyed to the Prince in these cryptic words :¹

"Le Cerf est aux toiles. La chasse est préparée."

Condé instantly took the alarm. And just as Charles and his mother had had to fly, not so long ago, from Monceaux in the early morning, so now on the 25th of August 1568 while still the young sun shone high in the heavens, Condé and Coligny mustered in the courtyard of the Prince's château, a sorry party, whose adventures and sufferings would be many before once again friendly walls would envelop them.

Condé's second wife, Françoise de Longueville, was in the midst of the anxious group, with her a cluster of children, three of them little more than infants in arms. There also were Coligny's children ; and also of the party, though her gallant husband was far away, was the wife of Andelot. Around that pathetic little group of women and children some hundred and fifty horsemen formed up, and then at a signal the whole cavalcade, led by the Prince and the Admiral, rode away on the first stage of a weary flight to the haven of Rochelle.

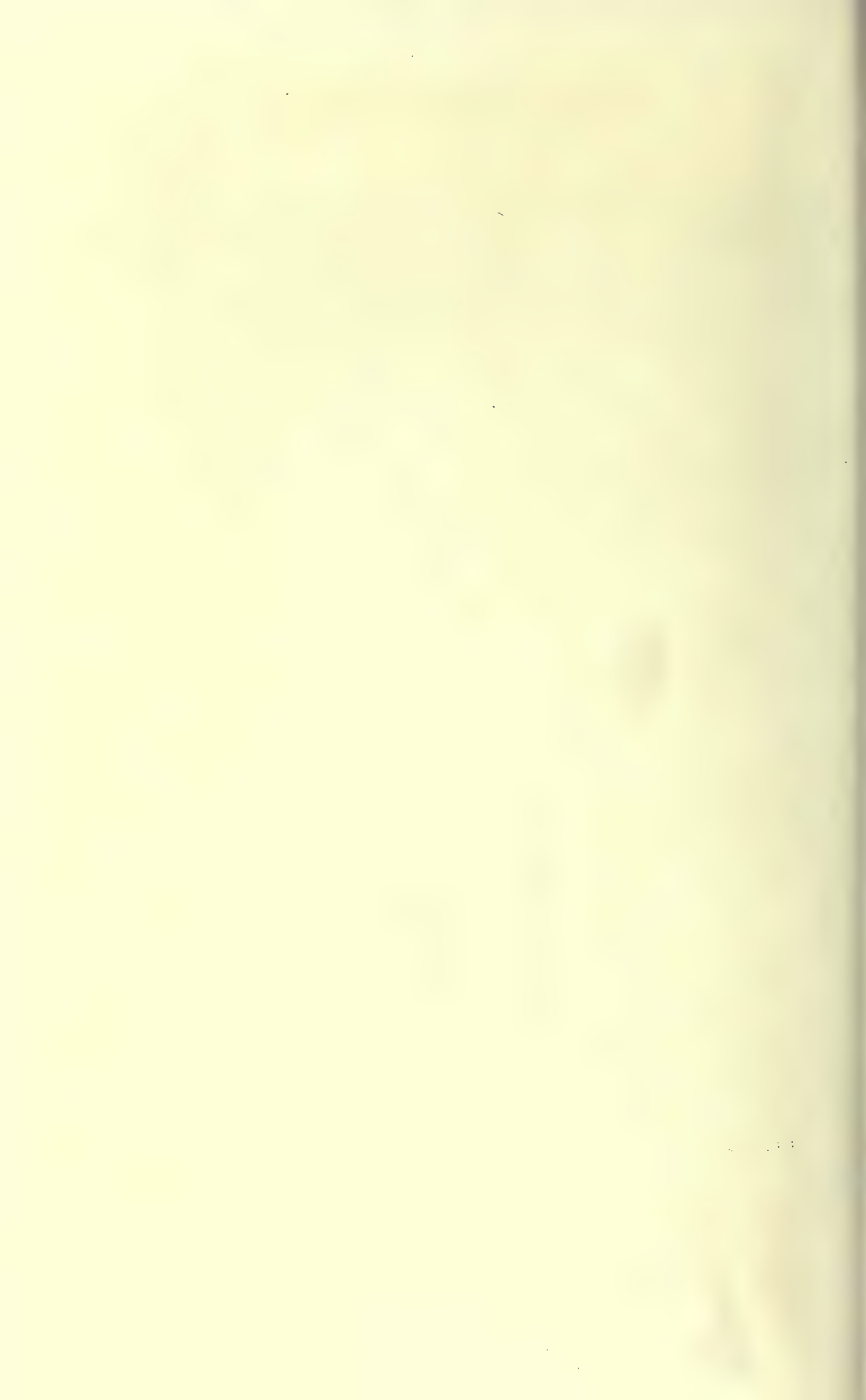
Soon the Royal troops were on the track of the fugitives, and a wild dash began to the banks of the Loire, across which every passage was held for the King. But luckily for Condé, he knew the Loire better than his enemies. He led his little troop to a ford near Sancerre. If that was guarded, all was lost, for the pursuers were on his heels, and

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after an enamel by Léonard Limosin, in the Louvre

FRANÇOISE D'ORLÉANS, PRINCESSE DE CONDÉ



women and babes could not ride like seasoned cavalrymen.

But the gods were on the Prince's side. The ford was shallow, and into the river they raced pell-mell and gained in safety the opposite shore. Hardly had they passed when, if the chroniclers speak truth, something of a miracle transformed the river. The waters, swollen doubtless by recent rains, suddenly came down in a mighty volume, and when the pursuers reached the shore they dare not venture into the whirling flood.

Meanwhile Fénelon was urging Jeanne to quit her dominions for Paris. Her reply to the Ambassador shows that she was well informed, no doubt through Condé, concerning Catharine's intentions.

"Monseigneur," replied the Queen, "what trust can I repose in the promises of a Court which, at the very time that it professes to treat with me, is plotting my arrest, and now would tear my children from me? No; I am well informed that the proscriptions of Flanders and merciless executions for heresy are on the point of being adopted here, according to the resolution taken at Bayonne with the Duke of Alba. Our Royal blood is even more interested in this measure than our Protestant faith; for the victim of these perfidious designs must be my son, the first Prince of the Blood.

"The Court of France, Monseigneur," she went on, "is agreed with that of Spain to complete my destruction, and that of my son also. Montluc already devours in anticipation my country of Bearn; the Spanish King is ready to seize upon Lower

Navarre. Losse, captain of his Majesty's body-guard, has been deputed to arrest me, and to tear my loved children from my arms. Montluc and d'Escars are directed to afford every facility in their power to the enterprise. In this extremity what resource is there left to my son, or to myself, except to make common cause with a noble and magnanimous Prince, whose ruin is no less desired than our own! No, Monseigneur, never will we more submit our lives and our fortunes to the inconstant favour of the Court."¹

Fénelon pointed out to Jeanne that in thus openly renouncing her allegiance she was inviting the certain ruin of her House; that the boy whom she loved would never succeed to the crown because she would have no crown to leave him. But Jeanne's mind was made up.

"I deem it," she said, "a sacred duty to share the perils of my fellow-worshippers; to afford them aid and every support in a contest for the holy cause of religion, of patriotism, of their King, and of liberty."

"This flame of civil war," replied Fénelon, "when once kindled will destroy your kingdom and the realm of France likewise."

Young Henry was present at some of these conversations between his mother and Fénelon. The Ambassador's gloomy visions and prophecies troubled him not. He had the genius of the true politician for realising that in politics there is no true tragedy, because the piece is never-ending; that when

¹ Freer's "Life."

everything is apparently settled, when everything is apparently lost or won, the settlement, the victory, the defeat, is but for a day; that the morrow, whenever it dawns, will bring its changes, its surprises, its compensations.

The enthusiasm which animated Jeanne was very different from her son's joyous acceptance of the pleasures of peace or the hard knocks of war. Her state of mind, her red-hot zeal, was admirably expressed in the following letter to her friend the Viscount Gourdon :

"You are, I presume," she wrote, "informed, ere this, that by the grace of God, and without sloth or deceit, I have openly engaged to follow the profession of the reformed faith, and to peril my crown, my dominions, and my son, to insure its public exercise, and the safety of all its professors. If damage happens to your castles and to your worldly goods, through the cruel and iniquitous edicts lately issued, fear not, for the God of Hosts will maintain His own righteous cause, and will abundantly recompense those who have fought and laboured in His service.

"The Prince of Condé, my brother-in-law, has claimed and obtained the aid of the Princes of Germany; and the Queen of England, who shares and sustains our belief, will in a short time aid me with troops and money; and not myself alone, but also all those faithful ones who refuse to bow the knee before Baal. You, and the other viscounts also, who like myself are firmly built up in the faith,

must set an example of fortitude and resignation. The Eternal God rejects the weak and faint-hearted. The blessed hour is at hand when those who are of Israel must risk the loss of their worldly goods, to build temples wherein God may be adored in spirit and in truth, in bodily worship, and with the homage of the heart; but where abominable idols are now enthroned. . . .

“For this purpose, at the end of the present month, I shall join the Prince at La Rochelle, with my son the Prince of Bearn, who bears you esteem and love. Since he has been with me, the latter Prince has made progress in faith, and shows himself to be a lover of truth and of arms. . . .”

Five days later, accompanied by her son and escorted by fifty gentlemen, Jeanne set out on as daring an enterprise as any ever undertaken by a widowed queen.

If grim ruin was to come, she resolved it would be only after such a fight as her race would remember for ever with pride. She would shake from her feet the dust of Navarre. She would forsake the mountains, with their petty victories and petty defeats, and go out into the plains, where the men who would live in history were mustering for the strain.

France called her, the France of Condé, Coligny, and valiant Andelot, and out with them she would go, to meet the storm where it blew fiercest and most unchecked.

On, then, to Rochelle!

CHAPTER XXII

A COMEDY OF ROYAL MAKE-BELIEVE

AS Jeanne made her way towards the famous port where the Huguenots were to make their fresh stand for liberty, the little force with which she had begun her journey was constantly reinforced. By the time she had reached Bergerac she was surrounded by an army of nigh four thousand men.

Young Henry rode at their head. His mother and sister were carried in a litter ; for though the former was sustained by her valiant spirit, of other strength she could have had but small share, with a deadly malady preying incessantly upon a frame worn with the ceaseless excitement of politics and the field.

Meanwhile a delicious trifle of comedy was proceeding in the district whence she had just fled. Jeanne had arranged that Madame de Montluc should visit her at Nerac on the very day of her departure. The appointment may have been intended as a ruse to cover her preparations. But, however that may be, Jeanne was desirous of sparing the wife of her inveterate enemy a journey that should end in mortifying disappointment. She therefore dispatched an officer of her suite to Agen to explain to that

lady that she had been obliged to take a journey ; that no visitors would be received at Nerac that day.

Instantly Montluc penetrated the truth. His wife might remain in Agen. His business called him away to join in that journey to which Jeanne's message made such vague allusion. Under his very nose his prey had escaped him, as she had once before escaped him when her son was a prize worth more to France than a dozen victories in the field. Far and wide he sent orders that she was to be intercepted ; and he himself joined in the pursuit to stimulate his men. But the woman's ready wit and resource had completely baffled him. Her calculations were accurate to the letter. And Jeanne had passed the Garonne, just as Condé had passed the Loire, before the Royal troops could come up with the fugitives and force an engagement.

Meanwhile Jeanne had taken occasion while at Bergerac to write to King Charles an apology and explanation, in which, while professing devotion to his crown, she expressed the belief that the Huguenots were being persecuted against his will and intention. It was indeed the King's misfortune that everybody professed to understand his true inclinations better than those whom he chose as his advisers. He was to have been kidnapped at Monceaux and held captive in order that he might enjoy true liberty ! Now Jeanne and her friends were going to do battle with the Royal troops in order that their master's will might be done !

“ Monseigneur,” she wrote, “ when I received

the letter which it pleased you to write and send by M. de La Mothe Fénelon, I was far advanced in my present enterprise, being overwhelmed with sorrowful dismay at the late disastrous revolution in affairs. Nevertheless, it is one by which we have been menaced long ; for we have noted the animosity of our enemies. Their malice, Monseigneur, has now extinguished the hope of tranquillity on which we relied, after the publication of your last edict of pacification.

“ Monseigneur, this edict has not only been badly observed, but its clauses have been reversed, and its import falsified by the Cardinal de Lorraine, who, in defiance of the promises which you have been pleased to make to your subjects of the reformed faith, by letters to your Parlements, and to others (as I myself witness), has rendered all the enactments of your said edict null and of no effect. The said Cardinal has kept all things in suspense, and has been the cause of so many unresented massacres, that, emboldened by the patience which we have hitherto manifested at his unprincipled dealings, he has now passed the limits of our endurance, by making enterprise even against the Princes of your Blood ; in witness of which, mark the pursuit which he has instituted against the Prince my brother.

“ Monseigneur, this said Prince has been compelled to seek succour and refuge amongst his kindred ; so that I and my son, being so nearly allied to him, find ourselves constrained to afford him that aid which the ties of blood and of friendship exact. We are well convinced of your gracious will : you have so

often assured us both by word of mouth and in writing that you desire from us only the service, fidelity, and obedience which we owe towards your Majesty, and in which we will not fail for any advantages that the world can offer. Monseigneur, we know that your goodness and benignant feelings would compel you to preserve our lives and fortunes, rather than to compass our ruin. Therefore, when we see such enterprises concerted against us, knowing that you are a monarch most faithful and veracious, and have promised us the contrary, we can arrive at no other conclusion but that we are persecuted despite your Royal will and intent, by the malicious enmity of the Cardinal de Lorraine, whose hatred we have so often experienced : I repeat, that we have ample reasons for judging thus.

“I pray you, therefore, Monseigneur, to take in good part, and let it not excite your Royal displeasure, that I have departed with my son from my dominions, in the firm intent of serving my God, yourself my King and Sovereign, and in succouring my kindred ; and, in concert with the latter, of opposing myself, so long as life and fortune lasts, to the shameless enterprises and malice of our enemies. I entreat you, moreover, Monseigneur, to believe that we have taken up arms for three things alone : first, to hinder our enemies from exterminating us, our children, and our friends, as they maliciously design ; secondly, to fight for your honour and service ; thirdly, to defend and protect the Princes of our Blood from the murderous violence of some about your person. . . .”¹

¹ Freer's "Life" ; and "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

To Catharine de' Medici and the Duke of Anjou she wrote in much the same strain. To the Cardinal de Bourbon she wrote in terms of bitter reproach.

"Until when," she wrote, "will you remain the slave of the Cardinal de Lorraine? Have you already forgotten his design upon your life? Do you remember no longer the disquietude he occasioned you, and which for long prevented your eyes from slumber? The false oath which this Cardinal has sworn before you seems to have dissipated your fears; you have chosen rather to believe the treacherous protestations of that knavish prelate than to save your race from destruction or to ward from your House the peril that menaces it! My brother, show to the world, and to France, that you resent the injuries inflicted on your kindred; prove that you share the indignation which animates my noble son, which glows in my own bosom, I who have adopted the interests of your House as my own. Let us both serve the King; you, according to your own holy and peaceful calling—I, according to the duties of my sex and my Royal dignity. We may not sheath the sword; nevertheless, let us both labour to accomplish the same mighty work—that of negotiating a peace; not merely a temporary suspension of arms, but solid and irrevocable peace."¹

Condé, with his companions, had reached Rochelle on the 18th of September, the ladies and children in a miserable plight after the exposure and hard-

¹ Freer's "Life"; and "Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret."

ships of their long and perilous journey. Ten days later tidings were received in the town that Queen Jeanne had kept her word, that she and her party had overcome all obstacles, threaded safely the many perils that obstructed their progress, and were now approaching the appointed rendezvous.

The coming of Jeanne was a day of festival at Rochelle. Condé rode out to meet her, and with the Prince her son on her right hand, and her intrepid brother-in-law on the other, the Queen of Navarre entered the town. The Mayor presented her with the keys amidst the plaudits of his people. A cavalcade of great ladies offered her greeting, and through the crowded streets she and her train rode to the Hôtel de Ville, which was to be her palace.

Amidst all the jubilation Jeanne could hardly forget that she was a fugitive from the home of her ancestors, a Queen only in name, that strangers ruled in her house, that she might return to it no more.

But the bitterness of this reflection had its compensations. At Rochelle, should the worst come, the sea was open to her and the ships of Elizabeth of England would pilot her to an asylum where she could await the time and tide when another blow might be struck for the cause to which she had given her life.

The policy that Elizabeth was pursuing in England, under circumstances that offered no analogy whatever to the situation in France, may well have exercised a potent influence over Jeanne. Rochelle



From an engraving after a painting by Holbein at Hampton Court

PRINCESS ELIZABETH, AFTERWARDS QUEEN ELIZABETH

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had doubtless been chosen as the Huguenot stronghold because it offered the means for free communication with England; and to England Jeanne now turned for assistance in the impending struggle. To Queen Elizabeth she wrote:

“In that which relates to myself, Madame, I entreat you to believe, that three things alone have induced me to depart from my kingdom; the first of which is, the cause of religion, menaced and afflicted by the treachery and barbarous policy of the Cardinal de Lorraine, and others inspired with like sentiments. It would be a scandal and a shame, Madame, that my name should be even mentioned in so holy a cause, in concert with other noble Princes and lords, if I did not determine to spare neither my blood nor my treasures to insure its success. . . .

“I pray you, Madame, receive the humble commendations of a mother and her children, who would fain render you service; also to credit what the Sieur de la Chastellier has in charge to unfold to your Majesty, whom I take the liberty of recommending to your gracious notice.”¹

Chastellier, the Seigneur de la Tour, with a fleet of nine vessels, sailed from Rochelle for England in October, carrying Jeanne's letter, which in due course was handed to her Majesty at Richmond Palace.

Elizabeth's response was to the point. It was her interest and her pleasure to keep France ablaze with civil strife; it was equally her interest and her pleasure

¹ “Mémoires de Jeanne d'Albret.”

to maintain on the frontiers of Spain a Queen who hated Philip, and who would grudge no sacrifice to thwart his policy and mortify his pride. She therefore presented Chastellier with six pieces of artillery and a large supply of munitions of war, as well as a sum of about fifty thousand pounds for Queen Jeanne.

This help was useful; but it was rather as a proof of good will and an augury of better things to come that it was most appreciated. The naval war, or rather the piratical enterprises carried on by the valiant but unscrupulous Rochellois were the main source whence the Huguenot treasury was replenished.

Many years of civil strife, during which one section of the combatants had thriven more or less on the plunder of the churches and the confiscation of their revenues, had left the cathedrals and convents and monasteries with but a small fraction of their former wealth. Wherever the Huguenot arms triumphed, that small fraction was appropriated to assist in keeping the troops in the field. It seemed, indeed, that only money was needed to insure final victory to their cause. Never had their prospects been so hopeful. Recruits crowded to their standard and enthusiasm ran high, for it seemed to these men who had so often tasted of defeat and disappointment that at last the chance had come to them of squaring accounts with their enemy.

The young Duke of Anjou was given the command of the Royal army, with Marshal de Tavannes and other officers to advise him. The young Prince of Bearn was invested with the nominal command of

the Huguenot forces. But the autumn was so far advanced when the tocsin sounded that nothing decisive was accomplished. When, however, the armies went into winter quarters, the advantage was all on the side of the Huguenots. But the advantage was due to local risings, to isolated successes where their partisans happened to be predominant, rather than to any large and well-planned measures taken by the generals.

These trivial gains must have been more than counterbalanced in Jeanne's estimation by the bad news which reached her from Navarre. When the secret of her flight became known, discontent was general. To deepen the chagrin of a people who may well have felt themselves betrayed, Spanish troops poured into Foix, and the fear of Jeanne's subjects that Philip's yoke would soon be upon them was shared to some extent at the Louvre.

The redoubtable Baron of Luxe was invoked to save the situation. King Charles issued an edict instructing him to seize Jeanne's dominions, hereditary and feudal, in the name of his Majesty; and the Parlement of Toulouse was enjoined to assist him in this enterprise. The Royal message to the Toulouse legislature explained the attitude of the French Court to Jeanne, thus:

"Charles, by the grace of God King of France, to our trusty and well-beloved members of the High Court of Parlement at Toulouse. We have been informed that our very dear and beloved aunt, and the Prince of Navarre her son, our dearly beloved

brother, are at this present time with those of our subjects in arms against our authority. Nevertheless, as the favours and gifts which they have received from our Crown are numberless, we cannot believe that they have taken this measure voluntarily and of their own free will ; otherwise, they would most justly be chargeable with the crime of ingratitude, considering the manifest and most notorious treason of those our said subjects. We having, therefore, always embraced the cause, and taken under our Royal protection the persons and domains of our said aunt and our brother her son, regarding their territories in all things as our own, it would now be unbecoming to our dignity not to extend to them our aid in their present calamitous captivity ; and also to employ ourselves to the utmost to preserve to the said lady and Queen her dominions, which may hereafter descend and appertain to the Prince her son. Such being our desire, and after due examination made of the means in our power to effect this object, we have found no remedy better calculated to obviate the evil designs of those who would do the said Queen disservice, than to take possession of her territories ; and not only those which she holds in fief from our Crown, but also the countries belonging to her in sovereign right. For this reason we order, command, and very expressly require you, by these our letters, to seize and retain, until our further command, all lands, towns, places, castles, and lordships belonging to the said lady and Queen, whether situated under our jurisdiction or not ; for which purpose we have given ample instructions to our well-

beloved and trusty Sieur de Luxe, Knight of our Order of St. Michael. Given at Paris this 18th day of October, in the year of our Lord 1568."

It would appear from this document that the sophism that your enemy was a prisoner and acting under compulsion was a regular feature of the politics and diplomacy of the day. It suited Jeanne to pretend that Charles was the victim of his friends. It suited Charles to pretend that Jeanne was the victim of hers. It was convenient to each to assume as an article of faith that a crowned head could do no wrong; that all the sins and follies of those days of wrath should in the final apportionment of justice be laid to the account of humbler mortals.

CHAPTER XXIII

"D'ARGENCE! D'ARGENCE! . . . YOU WILL NEVER
SAVE ME!"

EVEN during the winter the crash of arms and dread scenes attendant upon war were never far from Jeanne.

The Huguenots besieged the convent of St. Michel-en-l'Herme, near Rochelle, which had been transformed into a fortress, the garrison of which was a perpetual menace to the serenity of the town if not to its security. Situated as the place was on the coast, it enjoyed the double advantage of being able to harass convoys reaching the town by land and commerce and munitions of war borne thither over the sea.

The monks of their patron saint still remained to share their convent with the soldiers. And if the latter ever grew faint-hearted in the duty of defence, the monks were not remiss in cheering them to renewed efforts, for well they knew their fate, should Jeanne's troops enter their gates.

The place was, however, of so much importance that no pains were spared, no danger shirked, in the effort to reduce it. The artillerymen battered away with the cannon until a breach had been made which

the defenders could by no expenditure of energy or life hope to repair ; and the moment had come for the grand assault.

Then did the monks hope that their patron saint would by a miracle cast down their enemies and save them all, soldiers and religious, from the fearful doom that threatened them. On one side lay the sea, where every ship and every barren rock was in the hands of the Huguenots. To them it offered no hope of life and liberty. On the land side the prospect before them was as bad or, indeed, worse. For many and many a league there was no town or castle held by their friends ; nor was there the least likelihood that succour could reach them. All depended upon their swords and the mercy of their saint.

When the breach was practicable, the assault was delivered, and the devoted little stronghold that had so long annoyed Rochelle was taken by storm. The heroic garrison consisted of four hundred men. It was their last fight. Inspired by the fury of their captain, named Forteau, the assailants fell wildly on the foe who had so long baffled them, and the fight soon became a massacre. Forteau, drunk with slaughter, held forth his hands and arms dripping with the blood of his hapless countrymen lying dead or in their last agony at his feet. When the sword had done its work, when the crash of battle had ceased, and in its place were heard only the cries of wounded wretches praying for release from their sufferings, the victors turned to demolish the convent. Well they did their work. They never rested until they had laid it level with the dust.

Only four hundred men had fallen. Only a convent had been laid in ruins. It was a small affair. But the bloodshed, the ferocious spirit of cruelty, the lust for destruction that marked the victory, was but a type of similar events taking place all over the south of France, some on a larger scale, some on a smaller. Victory nearly always went hand in hand with wholesale murder. The laws of chivalry were utterly forgotten. It seemed indeed that, if the "Wars of Religion" only continued long enough, no religion whatever would be left in France. Christianity, and with it civilisation, would be smothered in blood, and nothing gentle or sacred of all its noble heritage remain.

At length the extreme severity of the winter seemed to have abated somewhat, and Anjou began to show impatience to reap some benefit from the large army that was now massed beneath his colours. Condé, on his side, made a pretence of being no less eager for battle. But it was only pretence. The Huguenots were in reality desirous of avoiding a serious encounter until important reinforcements, which were now expected, should have joined them. Wolfgang of Bavaria, Duke of Deux-Ponts, was leading to Condé's aid a large army from Germany, soldiers of fortune who plied their trade in every country where there was fighting to be done. For centuries the Germans had fought the battles of all Europe as well as those of their own land, serving any master who had gold to pay them, or in default of regular pay would lead them against rich cities where booty and rapine would requite their services. Deux-Ponts was

now on his way south with an army of these terrible wardogs, men who cared nothing for any creed or any country, but had come to batten upon the fair land of France.

Condé was also expecting the arrival of the “Army of the Viscounts,” as the force was called which had been raised by a number of noblemen on the authority of Jeanne’s commission, and at first intended by her to assist d’Arros, her Viceroy, in maintaining her authority in Bearn against the local rebels. Thus far, however, this force, owing to the jealousies of the chiefs, had accomplished nothing of importance. With Condé there would be less room for such dissensions. The Prince would find other work for them to do; for he needed every man and every gun to help him to do battle with Anjou in the engagement now impending—an engagement which might decide all their destinies.

To gain time, therefore, while waiting to effect a junction with his allies was Condé’s policy. It was Anjou’s business, on the other hand, to force him to an engagement and defeat him before he could join hands with either Deux-Ponts or the Viscounts.

In the Royal camp the game of make-believe being played by Condé and Coligny was perfectly understood. If all was not to be lost, the Prince should be compelled to make a stand. The Huguenots held many scattered posts along the Charente, the most important being the bridges at Saintes, Cognac, Jarnac, Châteauneuf, and Angoulême. Behind these, the main body of their army lay secure, the Royalists being far distant with the river between.

If there was to be a fight, it was necessary that Anjou should cross the Charente. But how to do so without giving the enemy time to escape with their army was the problem that had to be solved.

The Huguenots occupied the right bank. Anjou approached them along the opposite shore. The duty of Coligny, who commanded the rearguard, was a simple one. It was to prevent the Royal army crossing until such time as he should have escaped with his main body far into the country. With the Charente between them there could be no fight ; and a fight at this juncture with all the odds against them there should not be. Had the discipline of his troops been satisfactory, Coligny's idea might have been realised ; but their discipline was of the most shadowy kind. Every nobleman, every gentleman, carried with him to the colours a spirit of independence, a sense of his own personal importance that made strict and uniform cohesion and obedience impossible. The common soldiers, as might be expected, were no less independent. On the one hand, they were composed of rebels who had for years courted death for their opinions ; on the other, of foreign cut-throats whose lifelong trade was war and rapine. Of the two classes, the mercenaries were perhaps the better soldiers when there was nothing to plunder. The natives were mostly men who had made great sacrifices for the cause, men who were egotists before they were soldiers, as indeed they had earned some right to be.

At Châteauneuf the Huguenots had partly destroyed the bridge, and, content with this pre-

caution, withdrew to their billets, leaving their post practically unguarded. Under cover of darkness the Royalists repaired the bridge, and by break of day their army was pouring across the river.

When Coligny learned how he had been outwitted, or rather how badly he had been served by his subordinates, he gave orders for instant retreat. He had counted on being able to break away to the north and gain a couple of days' march towards the Loire before Anjou could discover the truth and begin the pursuit. But the river-posts had failed him. The sluggards of Châteauneuf had indeed betrayed him, and his calculations had come to nothing.

To Montgomery and the other Huguenot chiefs, dispersed with their troops over a wide area, he dispatched messengers, ordering them to rally round him instantly at Jarnac, whence they would march in search of a favourable battle-ground, or if possible escape and rejoin Condé.

The precious hours passed, still Montgomery and the others did not come. And all the time Anjou's men were gaining the right bank unchecked and forming up for an immediate advance. When at last his orders had been obeyed and all was ready for an orderly retreat, it was too late. Anjou's men were upon them, and it was no longer possible to defer the engagement that he had so long manœuvred to avoid.

The gallant old Admiral elected to make a stand at Bassac in order to profit by a little stream which obstructed the attacks of the Royal army. The

position was well chosen ; and the reckless bravery of Anjou's advance-guard enabled him to turn it to the best account. The attack was repulsed with so much spirit that the Royalists decided to halt for reinforcements. And Coligny, having thus gained precious time, was able to continue his retreat to the point where he had arranged to join forces with Condé.

Under dismal circumstances the two Huguenot chiefs met once more. The Admiral found the intrepid Condé a subject for the surgeon rather than for the battlefield. The Prince carried his arm in a sling, the result of an injury received when thrown from his horse the previous day. Nor was the measure of his ill-fortune complete. The Prince had scarcely been rejoined by Coligny when a furious kick from the horse of the Count of Rochefoucauld, his brother-in-law, smashed his right leg.

Nothing, however, could daunt the gallant Bourbon. With all his faults of head and heart, Condé had one virtue that could not be eclipsed. His courage was supreme, just as Antoine's had ever been, even in his most abandoned days. The weight of his misfortunes, instead of crushing him, seemed indeed to have inflamed his ardour.

"Let us go!" he cried to the gentlemen who surrounded him, witnesses as they were of what had befallen him. "This is the fight that we have so much desired. Remember in what plight Louis de Bourbon enters into it—for Christ and his country!"

In this exalted temper the injured Prince turned his horse's head towards the enemy, and when the time came he led the charge of the cavalry against

Anjou's lines. But the gods were not to be defied. The omens had given him fair warning, and he had not heeded them. Into the thickest of the fight he led his devoted cavaliers, a whirlwind of steel. But sheer bravery could not overwhelm an army equally brave, but far stronger and better disciplined, and unshaken the Royal ranks received the shock. The earlier events of the battle had all favoured them. They were full of heart. Victory was within their grasp. Condé should have fallen back and re-formed for another dash; but the gallant Prince disdained to yield an inch. His men fell all round him; still he fought on. Then Fate dealt him a cruel and irreparable blow. His horse dropped dead beneath him, and there lay the gallant leader, a helpless cripple in the thick of the fierce *mêlée*.

Then began a battle within a battle. The King, the Pope, the Gospel, Calvin, and the rest were all forgotten. The fight became a fight for Condé's life. Some three hundred gentlemen had ridden with him to the charge. Many had fallen in the first thunderous shock. Those that remained now rallied round their fallen chief. Amongst them was an old man of patriarchal mien, one la Vergne. Of that valiant three hundred, la Vergne's kinsmen—sons, grandsons, and nephews—had numbered twenty-five. Men and mere boys they now formed round their venerable grandsire, and of those who made a last stand to save Condé this family of heroes were the bravest of the brave.

One by one, however, the Prince's faithful body-guard fell or were taken prisoners. Of those that

remained, their number could be counted on the fingers of one hand. That was a debt that Bourbon should long remember to la Vergne. But the price was paid in vain. . . . At last Louis de Condé lay without defenders, wounded and naked to his enemies.

Amongst those pressing upon him, through the tangle of dripping steel, Condé beheld a nobleman whose life he had once saved. It was the Seigneur d'Argence. To the hapless Prince it may well indeed have seemed that angels had guided d'Argence thither to requite that supreme debt.

From where he lay, behind a rampart of the dead, Condé called to his former friend, but now an enemy in a changed world where wild passions seemed to have consumed in the fury of unbridled licence all the softer feelings of the human heart. But d'Argence had a good memory. The gallant nobleman's heart was sound and staunch. And at that call from the prostrate Prince he hastened to his side, and gladly promised him his protection.

But from other quarters of the field great personages who had seen the last stubborn stand made by the Prince's bodyguard came hurrying up. Amongst these was the Duke of Anjou himself, a mere boy in the midst of grizzled and hardened warriors.

Near Anjou rode Montesquiou, the captain of his Swiss guards. When Condé's eye fell upon the chief of the mercenaries, something warned him that all was over, that Jarnac was to witness the end.

"D'Argence!—d'Argence!" he cried, "I am a dead man! You will never save me!"

Condé's heart had not misled him. Before d'Argence could redeem the faith he had pledged to be the Prince's shield, before he could repay his debt and return the fallen warrior life for life, Montesquiou had galloped up and, levelling a pistol, shot the helpless prisoner dead in cold blood before the eyes of all.

Young Anjou is said to have rejoiced over the murder of his kinsman. Whether in jest or in a spirit of perverse piety he spoke of raising a chapel upon the scene of the crime. His old preceptor is said to have rebuked him for such graceless elation. The young Prince's conduct has no doubt been put in the worst light by his enemies. In those days of bitter feud and faction the chronicles were apt to be deeply coloured by the bias of the writer. But however Anjou viewed the crime, certain it is that its author not only passed unpunished, but was regarded by the wilder spirits amongst his comrades as having performed an exemplary feat of arms.

Not only did the assassin escape unpunished, but the remains of Condé were denied the honour due to his rank and valour. The body was thrown across an ass's back and was thus carried from the field. Later it was handed over to the Princess of Condé's brother, the Duke of Longueville, and was interred at Vendôme in the tomb of his ancestors.

Meanwhile Coligny and Andelot had succeeded in beating a retreat to St. Jean-d'Angely. In the first depression of feeling following this defeat, the Huguenot forces could with difficulty be controlled by their officers. They spoke of abandoning the

field altogether, and, without awaiting the arrival of Deux-Ponts, of locking themselves up in Rochelle. The death of Condé seemed to them to have robbed them of a chief whose place could not be filled. They conceived themselves to be the victims of irreparable disaster, when only discipline and able generalship were needed to retrieve the situation. So profound was their despair, it threatened to end in such dire calamity as they foolishly imagined had already befallen them. With an army plunged deep in a morass of despondency it was impossible to reason. Their losses at Jarnac had been comparatively light. The engagement had never become general. What fighting had been done, the brunt of it had been borne by Condé's small company of gentlemen. The common soldiers had therefore suffered lightly. It was the glamour of Condé's name, his gay and reckless manners, his high spirits and jovial wit, above all his kinship to the Royal House, that had given him his great place in the army. And now Coligny rightly judged that what was wanted was some move that would appeal to the imagination and rouse the generous emotions of the disheartened soldiery, something that would kindle once more in their hearts as if by magic the fighting spirit and make them men again.

They were but children, though they had seen such deeds and done them as might make angels weep. And as children the old Admiral treated them.

Jeanne was at Rochelle. To her he sent a message begging her to come to him, that all they loved was



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale by François Clouet

GASPARD DE COLIGNY (1570), ADMIRAL OF FRANCE

trembling in the balance. Well he knew that she would not fail him, and then, with what confidence he could command, there was nothing to be done but watch Anjou's movements and await her coming. If the sight of Condé, a Prince of the Blood, riding in the van could nerve these men to any exploit, surely the presence in the camp of a Queen, herself a Valois, the near kinswoman of the King, would act like a charm upon the rude but simple soldiery.

Ever prompt to act, Jeanne no sooner received the call than she was on her way to the army.

She may well have carried a heavy heart as she hastened to the place where she was to perform the miracle for which Coligny had summoned her. Nobody knew better than she what a loss their cause had sustained in the death of her brother-in-law. In all Europe there was no more dashing cavalry leader than he. Coligny was old and slow, and either too cautious or too confident. The Prince's recklessness and headstrong valour were in some measure the perfect counterpoise to such qualities. Even his very faults were those which endeared him to the soldiery.

If it should be true that the death of Condé meant the ruin of the Huguenot cause, then had Montesquiou's pistol shattered at the same time Queen Jeanne's fortunes and those of her son, for she had staked her all on the issue of this war. Others had forsaken their homes, but she had left behind her a kingdom, and had deserted her people to take a share in the perils and glories and harvest of the field. She had

played for a mighty stake—how mighty only she herself knew—and thus far all her high hopes and sacrifices had carried her only to black Jarnac.

With the Queen of Navarre, on her journey to the army, rode two youths, with the world all before them, all their battles still unfought, their laurels as yet ungarnered. One was her son, Henry, Prince of Bearn, now fifteen and a half years old; the other was her nephew, the dead Prince of Condé's heir, and now himself bearer of the famous name—a boy of sixteen.

Coligny had sent for Jeanne to galvanise, by the contagion of her courage and enthusiasm, the soldiers who had become children into soldiers once more. Jeanne had seen in her mind's eye the disconsolate troopers, weary of war after one taste of defeat, and had done better even than Coligny had hoped for. She had brought her son and nephew with her. They had lost a Condé; but she would give them a Condé in his place—his father's son. And if that were not enough, they would have her own son too. Such a gift from a woman, a mother, a Queen, would assuredly make the blood of Frenchmen tingle in their veins, and fill their hearts with joy and pride in the flag for which such glorious sacrifices were cheerfully rendered!

The whole army was drawn up to receive the Queen of Navarre and the two Princes. As the great lady came in sight, her son on her right hand, her nephew on her left, a wave of emotion swept over the Huguenot lines. And Coligny, watching the clouds vanish from the brows of his veterans, knew

that the miracle-worker had accomplished the prodigy for which she had come. The situation was saved. A woman whose whole soul was valour, they could not be downcast and look upon her.

Nearer she came, the young Princes still on either side, while from the Huguenot ranks a mighty roar of joy went out to bid her welcome. Up and down the lines she rode, looking into the faces of the men who had lost heart because of so small a thing as a general's death, as though Death were not a common interloper in every camp, choosing his victims from great and small, in virtue of his world-old seigniory. Her coming changed everything. Now, Death was nothing, or at most a doubtful fellow, neither friend nor foe, whose vagaries gave to a soldier's proud defiance, to a soldier's debonair philosophy, all its glory.

When Jeanne had reviewed the army, she addressed them as follows :

"Children of God and of France, Condé is no more! That Prince, who has oftentimes set you the example of courage and of unstained honour, who was always ready to combat for his King, his country, and his faith, who never took up arms except to defend himself against implacable enemies—that heroic Prince, whom even his foes were constrained to reverence, has sacrificed his life for the noblest of causes! Instead of receiving from us the laurel crown, the just guerdon of his valour, his brows are now circled with the diadem of immortal glory. Condé has resigned his breath on the battlefield, in the midst

of his career of fame. He is dead! A sacrilegious hand has severed the thread of life. His enemies have deprived him of being, by a deed of cowardly perfidy. What say I? Have they not even added foul insult to his cold remains? Oh! how, by this base outrage, have they not increased his renown, and defiled for ever the laurels culled on the fatal field of Jarnac!

“Soldiers, you weep! But does the memory of Condé demand nothing more than tears? Will you be satisfied with profitless regrets? No! Let us unite, and summon back our courage, to defend a cause which can never perish, and to avenge him who was its firmest support! Does despair overpower you? Despair! that shameful failing of weak natures—can it be known to you, noble warriors and Christian men? When I, the Queen, hope still, is it for you to fear? Because Condé is dead, is all, therefore, lost? Does our cause cease to be just and holy? No! God, Who placed arms in his hand for our defence, and Who has already rescued you from perils innumerable, He has raised us up brothers-in-arms worthy to succeed him, and to fight for the cause of religion, and the King, our country, and the truth!

“Not only Princes of Royal lineage remain for our leaders, but Coligny, la Rochefoucauld, la Noue, Rohan, de Piles, d’Andelot, Montgomery! To these brave warriors I add my son. Make proof of his valour! He burns with holy ardour to avenge the death of the Prince. Behold, also, Condé’s son! now become my own child. He is the worthy inheritor of

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his father’s virtues. He succeeds to his name and to his glory!

“Soldiers! I offer to you everything in my power to bestow: my dominions, my treasures, my life, and that which is dearer to me than all—my children! I make here solemn oath before you all—and you know me too well to doubt my word—I swear to defend to my last sigh the holy cause which now unites us, which is that of honour and of truth!”¹

The soldiers, thrilled by the Queen’s words, abandoned themselves to the wildest enthusiasm. Young Prince Henry, as had doubtless been intended, became the centre of this storm of emotion. These men should have an idol in camp and field, and the stripling’s hour had come to receive the incense of that strange idolatry. Doubtless he had been well drilled for the part.

“Soldiers!” he exclaimed, “your cause is mine; our interests are the same. I swear to you by soul’s salvation, by my honour and by my life, never to abandon you!”²

The young Prince of Condé also addressed the soldiers, and before the whole army the youths saluted each other as brothers-in-arms. Thus had Jeanne converted an army of despairing men into one with spirit for any enterprise.

From St. Jean-d’Angely Jeanne retired once more to Rochelle. There she was again obliged to solve the problem of finding money for the army. For the needful supplies she turned to England. Queen

¹ Freer’s “Life.”

² Freer’s “Life”; Mézeray.

Elizabeth was her pawnbroker. Valuable jewels of the House of Albret were placed in the latter's keeping as security for a loan. The valuables thus sent to England included a diamond necklace of great antiquity, long held by the House of Albret as a treasured heirloom. In the inventory forwarded to Queen Elizabeth this necklace was described as being set with eleven large diamonds, and was estimated as worth one hundred and sixty thousand crowns. Another of Jeanne's possessions to cross the seas was a fine ruby and pearl ring, worth one thousand crowns.

On receipt of the money which Elizabeth advanced upon these and other articles pledged with her by Coligny and young Condé, Jeanne wrote to her Britannic Majesty as follows :

“ Madame, I will not fail to profit by the present opportunity to thank you for your past kindnesses, and for the assistance which it has pleased you to bestow upon us, beseeching you, Madame, to continue this your favour and countenance, in return for which I pray God to grant you rewards worthy of your piety and exalted dignities. First, Madame, I supplicate that the great God may bestow everlasting felicity upon you, who so nobly sustains the Church ; secondly, the heartfelt homage of all the valiant princes, nobles, and captains who have vowed to serve you ; thirdly, glory and honour so exalted that your renown, Madame, may resound to the limits of the world itself. Madame, I will not enter upon the subject of our affairs, as M. l'Amiral intends to

explain to you every incident connected therewith. I shall only commend myself, Madame, to your Majesty's gracious favour, while supplicating God to augment the mercies He is pleased to vouchsafe you. . . ."

Scarcity of money had indeed become a serious source of embarrassment to the Huguenot army. To the Royal army it was hardly less so. But while the Paris Government still enjoyed large opportunities for borrowing, the revolutionary Government possessed no such resources. The Rochellois, as has been said, raided the neighbouring seas, plundering the ships of Catholic powers. But by this time the sailors of Spain and Portugal, of Venice and Austria, had learned prudence, and did not lightly risk their vessels within range of the pirates. The Church lands and revenues and real property had long since been confiscated wherever the Huguenot armies were victorious. Cities had been plundered of all their riches. Still, the troops should be fed if they could not be paid, and since the enemy could no longer be robbed, it became necessary to tax the friendly citizens of Rochelle. This was a development by no means agreeable to the townsfolk. They resisted sturdily Queen Jeanne's ordinance. But in finance as in religion her decrees were stern and immutable. Money was required, and it was for Rochelle to find it, or disobey her mandate at its peril.

CHAPTER XXIV

JEANNE SAVES COLIGNY

THE young Prince of Bearn was now commander-in-chief of the Huguenot army, with Coligny and the brave Andelot as his advisers. But not for long did the Admiral enjoy this comradeship in high authority. His brother, the idol of the army for his reckless valour, was stricken with fever and died at Saintes.

But despite these misfortunes, which robbed the Huguenots of the leaders they loved and trusted, Anjou never struck the decisive blow which was to crush them and restore peace to France, even though it should be the peace of the grave.

The Cardinal de Lorraine has been blamed for Anjou's weakness, by withholding from him reinforcements—a measure that would seem to have been beyond his power. By way of supplying a basis for this charge it has been said that he wished his brother, the Duke of Aumale, to reap the glory of fighting the battle which would prove the decisive engagement. Whatever the cause, to Aumale fell the ultimate duty of checking the tardy advance of the Germans under the Duke of Deux-Ponts. At the same time Castelnau was sent to Flanders to the Duke of Alba, to beg



From a photograph by A. Giraudon, Paris, after an anonymous drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale
DUKE OF ANJOU, AFTERWARDS HENRY III.

assistance from him. Alba promised with alacrity, but at the same time he charged Castelnau to warn the King and his mother "never to make peace with their rebel subjects, and still less with the Huguenots ; but to exterminate them."

Aumale professed to be too weak to withstand the German advance. He therefore fell back before Deux-Ponts, who passed the Loire without opposition. But in this campaign, so fatal to the generals, the Bavarian chief was destined to share the fate of Condé, of Andelot, and of many another bearer of a famous name. He was struck down with fever. His friends told him the best way to shake off his illness was to offer it defiance. It was advice to the taste of the bold soldier of fortune. He permitted himself a debauch that was to cure him ! And that was the end of Duke Wolfgang. He died on the very eve of the junction of his army with the Huguenots—a feat that marked a greater triumph over the Royal generals than almost any that could be gained in actual battle. The King's authority was but a fiction when a handful of foreigners could thus march across France, living on the country, without once having to call a halt in their devastating progress. And even the Huguenots were not without shame at the degradation that had overtaken their country.

The Duke of Anjou had thirty thousand men under his command. The Huguenots, counting the newly joined Germans, had twenty-five thousand. Catharine de' Medici and the Cardinal de Lorraine came to the Royal camp at Roche-Abeille, in Limousin, to exchange views with the men who were so successful

in marching and counter-marching without accomplishing anything. They blamed the tactics employed by Tavannes ; and reproached the chief officers for not carrying on the campaign with greater energy. The young Duke of Guise and some other noblemen, thinking to dazzle the Court and confound the veterans, delivered an attack without orders. They were repulsed with heavy loss, and, far from dazzling the Court, they had to lament the capture of Philippe Strozzi, a kinsman of the Queen's, who had recently been made Colonel-General of infantry. Altogether the Royal army lost, as a result of this foolish enterprise, forty captains and five hundred soldiers killed, and a great number of prisoners of less distinction than Strozzi.

Elsewhere the Royal forces were equally unfortunate, while the Huguenot armies had never before known such a course of prosperity. Jeanne had gone from Rochelle to join the army, and found affairs so flourishing there that it was resolved to send a force to conquer her dominions.

Gabriel de Lorges, the Count of Montgomery, he who had slain Catharine's husband in the lists long years before, was now sent into Bearn with an army of some eight thousand men to restore there the authority of its fugitive sovereign. Montgomery had found a refuge in England after the tragedy of the tournament, but during the "Wars of Religion" he had returned to join the enemies of the King, and had won distinction under the Huguenot standard. He was now to defile the history of his day with one of its darkest chapters.

Not a rood of Jeanne's dominions remained loyal to her. The Baron of Arros had failed utterly to maintain the authority she had entrusted to him. His failure had indeed been so abject, she may well have regretted her choice of such a Viceroy. Grammont had failed, but his failure was mild in comparison with that of Arros. Grammont had retained power by yielding to the people; Arros had been driven to the last ditch in a desperate effort to withstand the popular will.

Practically all Jeanne's nobility were arrayed against her representative. Most warlike of all was her old enemy the Baron of Luxe, fulfilling his commission from Charles. Luxe's chief allies were Pordeac, St. Colombe, Gerdretz, Goas, and Navailles. Even the Seneschal of Bearn, Jeanne's former friend, the Baron of Audaux, had declared for submission to France, with a reservation that showed him to be an adept at employing the shams invented by his betters. He declared that he would once more transfer his allegiance to Jeanne when she should recover her—liberty.

Arros was besieging St. Colombe in Oberon when the Seigneur de Terride, who had been dispatched thither by Catharine de' Medici, relieved the garrison. The arrival of the Royal army was the death-blow of the Viceroy's hopes. Bereft of all chance of crushing the rebels and re-establishing Jeanne's authority, he shut himself up in Navarreins, whither long ago his Royal mistress had fled when dire peril had, as she imagined, threatened her from Spain. One after another every strong place in the

country surrendered to the French or their friends the rebel barons, and even Pau was occupied by the invaders.

With the whole country in their hands, the French turned to reduce Navarreins. And if Montgomery was to save this fortress from the disgrace of receiving an enemy within its walls, he should lose no time.

And he lost none. How he succeeded in reaching Bearn without meeting with disaster is wellnigh inexplicable. His good fortune has been attributed to the jealousies and intrigues that enfeebled the Royal army. King Charles, it is said, had grown envious of his brother's fame, or what passed for fame in a world where everything accomplished by his subordinates was credited to the talents of the Royal stripling. Where the fountain of authority was thus polluted, it was impossible that the army could operate with rapidity and decision. The intrigues of the Court could not fail to affect the generals who, whether through remissness or treachery or through sheer incapacity, permitted Montgomery to slip past them and enter Bearn. Straight to his goal he marched through the little principality, and halted within sight of Navarreins. Terride beheld the relieving force with bitter chagrin. He had delayed the assault too long. Now he should raise the siege and leave the strongest place in Jeanne's dominions in the hands of the enemy. He dare not even think of engaging Montgomery's army, with the garrison waiting but an opportune moment to sally forth and fall upon his rear. He therefore retired; and the beleaguered for-

tress throwing open its gates, Arros and Montgomery joined hands.

The French meanwhile had fallen back on Orthez and there prepared to withstand a siege. If relief was to come to them from the neighbouring city, it should not be long delayed, for the place was not adapted to a prolonged defence against an overwhelming investing force. Terride, however, resolved to make the best of his materials. A post was found for every man. Even the priests were called to the walls from the altar, and arms thrust into their hands. But when all that was possible had been done, the defence of Orthez still remained but a forlorn hope.

How forlorn the devoted garrison were soon to realise to the full. With incredible celerity Montgomery advanced to the walls. With the same swift and stern resolve the order was given for a general assault. There was no resisting such hurricane tactics. This man, who had with his own hand slain a King, was invincible. The besiegers poured into the town in a flood that could not be stemmed. And soon the battle had become a butchery. Mercy there was none that day. Leaders and men all alike were mad for blood; all alike revelled in the carnival of horrors. Nor was there pity any more than mercy. The terrified children and the wretched mothers to whom they clung perished by the swords that were already dripping with the blood of husbands and of fathers. When at last the soldiery wearied in their slaughter, they still were not surfeited. It was only the manner of the debauch of blood that was changed; for they began to hurl their victims into the river. The fiendish

sport went on apace until the greedy waters were laden with a great rampart of bodies that dammed its course. Their sword-arms were aching, the river was gorged, but still the end had not come of that hell upon earth. The soldiery had forgotten the convents, or had held them in reserve to provide the crown for this festival. Now they turned to where the hapless nuns awaited their doom, wondering perchance why it had been so long delayed. But if a respite had been given them, all the more agonising was to be the fate decreed for them.

After the sword and the river, these gluttons for the luxury of beholding suffering in all its most excruciating forms should kindle a fire for their victims. The torches were set alight; willing hands applied them to the doomed walls; and soon the convents were a mass of seething flames. Within their prisons of fire the hapless sisters expiated the grievous crime of having forsaken the world for the cloister and the veil.

The priests still remained. But the ingenuity of Montgomery's men was not exhausted. Their ferocity was still unsubdued, still unappeased. The ecclesiastics should in their death furnish something of a spectacle, something of a recreation to men who had earned the right to rest and take their pleasure.

They were therefore marched to the bridge spanning the waters of the Gave, the waters that had already carried so many of their fellow-townsmen to eternity. Bound hand and foot, they were cast headlong into the stream below, while the soldiery

thronging the banks feasted their eyes upon the last struggles of the drowning men.

Nor was this the last act in the tragedy of Orthez. Terride and the rebel barons had fled to the citadel when the fate of the town and the townspeople was sealed beyond all shadow of hope. From their retreat they could see the red work going on in the streets around. To their ears came the wild oaths of despairing men, the frenzied cries of women, the shrieks of children convulsed with terror. They were like men condemned to the Inferno, but condemned first to stand at its portals and gaze upon what passed within, upon what awaited them. When the sword had wrought something of silence, they saw great tongues of fire leap into the sky. Now Montgomery had leisure to think of them. The guns were trained upon their refuge, ready to pound the walls into dust about their ears. Their position was hopeless. Their only chance lay in not exasperating this terrible enemy. A flag of truce was therefore run up and a parley was opened.

Terms of capitulation were agreed upon without difficulty; indeed, the rebel barons may well have felt some uneasiness at the ready clemency shown them by the ferocious victor. The same man who had heard the lamentations of women and children unmoved and raised a monument of ashes to his prowess, was now ready to spare the lives of the chieftains!

The conditions conceded to Terride and his companions were:

1. Huguenot ministers taken during the war

were to be set at liberty and their property restored to them.

2. Terride should be set free on payment of a ransom of eight hundred gold crowns, or he might be exchanged for a prisoner of equal rank.

3. Terride's companions of gentle blood should suffer no other penalty than to be retained as prisoners of war until they should be ransomed or exchanged.

4. The common soldiers were to be set at liberty.

According to these conditions, Jeanne's rebel barons should simply be held as prisoners of war. Glad to escape with their lives, they seemingly raised no opposition to the capitulation, and like the French delivered up their swords.

The rebel barons, Sainte Colombe, Gerdretz, Goas, Favas, Pordeac, and Caudan, were conveyed to the fortress of Navarreins—Navarreins the impregnable! No enemy could cross its moat; from its frowning keep no enemy could escape. Montgomery had pledged his word that they should be set free when their ransom had been paid. The hour of their ransom was at hand! On the 24th of August they were led from their dungeons. The courtyard of the fortress was lined with troops armed to the teeth, and, looking upon the formidable array, the wretched nobles can hardly have doubted but that they had reached the last vicissitude of fortune. Their anxiety, their doubts and fears, were shortlived. In every face they could read the price of their liberty, the measure of their ransom! At a sign the soldiery fell

upon the prisoners and massacred them in cold blood. The rebel barons were free ! And the black memory of Orthez had been touched with still one darker shade of infamy.

On the 23rd of August 1569, after a campaign of only a couple of weeks, Montgomery entered Pau. The conquest of Bearn for Jeanne was complete.

The deluge of blood that had been shed, the sufferings of her enemies and of her friends, the desolation that lay upon the land, left Jeanne's proud spirit unchastened. Nothing would suffice but that she should crush every vestige of independence out of her gallant people. They should obey blindly, without question, without pretension to any rights as opposed to her supreme will. In France they might compromise and bargain ; in Navarre she would have no bargaining : her word should be the law.

Taught prudence by what had happened in Bearn, the people of Lower Navarre tried to make terms with Montgomery. The effort would have been in vain, but that the officer who was appointed to lead the troops against them was at the last moment suspected of treachery. His marching orders were countermanded ; he marched no more. A dagger buried in his heart put a swift term to his soldiering. And now the Navarrois might breathe freely, for Montgomery was needed elsewhere. By Jeanne's command he republished all her edicts, and having handed over their administration once more to Arros, he departed for Condom, there to wait upon events.

Dramatic tidings soon reached his encampment.

All his victories, all his butcheries, had been more than counterbalanced by one disastrous engagement elsewhere. On the 3rd of October the Huguenots under Coligny had joined battle with the Royal forces under Anjou, at Moncontour. For a little while the tide of battle stood stock-still ; but not for long. First of all Coligny was grievously wounded. Then the Huguenot cavalry were cut off from the infantry, while the German mercenaries were abandoned to the fury of the Swiss, who fell on them in overwhelming strength.

The tragedy had its bewildering incongruities. The Swiss, though fighting under the Royal banner, were Calvinists almost to a man ; the Germans, fighting for the Huguenots were mostly Catholics. The latter, appealing for quarter to the Swiss, cried out :

“ Bon papiste moi ! . . . Bon papiste moi ! ”

But to the Protestant Swiss, fighting the Catholic battle, that cry was perhaps the one of all others that ensured the fatal blow. Their appeal for quarter fell on ears and hearts of stone, and they were cut down almost to a man. Coligny had sent away the young Prince of Bearn and his cousin Condé before the battle. Everything therefore depended upon the old Admiral remaining on the field. Well-nigh fainting with loss of blood and pain, his valiant and obstinate spirit nevertheless sustained him. He fought to the last, and managed to lead a remnant of his army from an encounter that seemed to threaten them with overwhelming and final disaster.

When news of this blow to her hopes reached Jeanne at Rochelle, she hastened at once to join

the Huguenot forces. When all went well with them, she was content to follow the operations from a distance. But in the hour of darkness, when Fortune seemed to have utterly deserted the cause, she flew to the point of danger, ready no doubt, if necessary, to put herself at the head of the army and give her life to avert the ruin of all she held dear.

When Jeanne arrived at Niort, she found the old Admiral in plight as miserable as could well overtake a general. His officers were almost in open mutiny. They blamed him for their defeat. And he, ill and weak from his wound, was utterly incapable of taking measures to vindicate his authority and reputation.

The appearance of Jeanne upon the scene changed the whole situation, as it had done once before when the death of Condé had seemed the prelude to certain destruction. She proposed that Coligny should lead his troops to form a junction with Montgomery, and winter with him in Languedoc. As for Rochelle, if Anjou, flushed with victory, should march against it, she would herself withstand the shock and, as commandant, hold the place while a man would share with her the glory of its defence.

But Jeanne's valour was not to be thus put to the test. Anjou's victory bore fruit that soon turned to ashes. He wasted his strength in tedious operations, instead of pressing upon the rear of the defeated army and forcing upon it another and more decisive engagement.

The winter of 1569-70 passed without any important advantages being gained by either side in

the field. But with the return of spring Coligny proceeded to put into operation the plan of campaign that had been resolved upon at Niort on that dark day when Jeanne had, for a second time, proved his salvation. Anjou had had his chance and missed it. It was now the turn of the Huguenots. The old Admiral with the impetuosity of youth leaped at the opportunities the gods threw in his way. He marched from success to success, and at length, on the 25th of June, he encamped at Arnay-le-Duc and prepared for a battle on which depended the fate of the capital itself.

For some time informal negotiations for peace had been in progress. The first overtures had been made by Catharine. But the demands of the Huguenots had been rejected with scorn. The army encamped at Arnay-le-Duc reduced her Majesty to a more accommodating frame of mind. Her treasury was empty. Vast countrysides, the fairest in Europe, had been laid desolate. The châteaux of her proudest nobles, the cathedrals of the great prelates, had been stripped bare. The King was in rebellion against her as the authoress of half of his misfortunes. Under such circumstances she dare not allow Paris to become a prey to the rebels and risk at once its destruction and her own.

The negotiations under the fillip of such considerations made rapid progress, and the Huguenots obtained terms, or rather dictated them, which promised them henceforth equality with their fellow-subjects. King Charles furthermore engaged to receive back the Queen of Navarre and the Prince of Bearn into

favour, and to restore to their owners all estates that had been confiscated.

The treaty was signed at St. Germain on the 11th of August 1570. And a couple of weeks later the arrival of couriers with the good news was celebrated at Rochelle with great solemnity. Guns were fired, church bells rang out. The citizens, weary of taxation that ground them to the dust, rejoiced. But amidst the jubilation of the populace, the heart of Jeanne was heavy. The war was over; everything was as it was. They had obtained nothing except a treaty, and experience had taught her that treaties were not worth the parchment upon which they were written. At the moment when it seemed as if she had lost, beyond repair, wellnigh everything, Catharine, by yielding everything, had made herself mistress once more of all their destinies—and Catharine she would not, she could not, she dare not trust.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LOOM OF THE BLOOD-COLOURED LIVERY

THE gates of Rochelle were still guarded by night and by day. Jeanne of Navarre was still the governor of the town, and for her there could be no peace. It was not that the war was over ; it was only that its form was changed.

Messengers arrived almost daily from the Queen-Mother begging Jeanne to visit the Court. But the Queen of Navarre sent back polite and even cordial replies without accepting the invitation. Preparations were at this time in progress for the marriage of King Charles with Elizabeth, daughter of the Emperor Maximilian II., and it was desired that Jeanne and her son and the other Huguenot chiefs should appear at the Court for the festivities. But Jeanne replied that "the populace, excited by the past troubles, will not willingly see me travel attended by a numerous escort of armed men ; while the state of the roads, infested by banditti, permits me not to attempt the journey surrounded only by my ordinary suite."

Albert de Gondi, Count of Retz, with a brilliant suite, was sent into Germany to escort the bride to her new home. Ferdinand, brother of the Emperor, represented Charles at the marriage-by-proxy. Then

the Frenchmen took charge of the young Queen, and Elizabeth, turning her back upon her own home, was carried to the most splendid, the most luxurious, the the wittiest, gayest, and most unhappy Court in Christendom.

At Mézières Charles received his bride, and there, on the 26th of November, the nuptials were celebrated afresh, and once more France had a Queen-consort. But of as much importance to Charles as his own marriage, indeed of more importance to him, was that which had been projected for his sister, the beautiful young Marguerite of Valois. We have seen that long ago, when Marguerite was but a child, her father had promised her to young Henry of Bearn, then but a sturdy boy, whose ready tongue and bright eye had captured the French King's fancy. The time had now come for the fulfilment of that promise. Wars and dissension had often made it appear well-nigh impossible that the pair could ever be united. But now there was peace at last in Navarre. Charles was utterly weary of incessant strife. And he saw no more certain means of making the peace real and permanent than by uniting his sister with Henry of Bearn, the chief by birth of the Huguenots.

It has been suggested that during those autumn days of 1570, when he himself was but a bridegroom, the King of France was already harbouring the idea of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Wholesale murder was, in one way or another, part of the routine of politics. At the lowest estimate, three thousand lives had been lost at Orthez, a great number being those of non-combatants. Yet Mont-

gomery was held for a man of honour ! If a general might deluge a town with innocent blood, yet pass as a hero amongst his countrymen, the conscience of the nation generally must have been blunted, wholly blunted, as to the value of human life. It would be hazardous to conclude, therefore, that the notion of an indiscriminate massacre as the cure for all his ills was never entertained by the King. It is certain, however, that he was not naturally cruel, rather otherwise. He loved music and poetry and art, and the society of men of letters. He had no ambition to be a Francis I. He desired nothing more than a life of elegant ease and the relaxation of the chase. If he disliked the Huguenots, it was because they made ease impossible.

But the boy had been reared in an atmosphere of blood. The murder of an individual was an event that passed unnoticed at the Court of the Valois, if the assassin was a favourite or the favourite of a favourite. The news of bloodshed in either town or country was, indeed, received at Court as a commonplace of history, no page of which was unstained by great crimes. The young King would exorcise, if he could, all such horrors from the land by adding one more to the long list of political marriages that had been fruitful of so much misery to his country. The dagger had its uses. His upbringing had taught him to assign it a place of consequence in the management of his affairs. But though evil counsellors may have dared to whisper in his ear that a Sicilian Vespers was the simplest mode of ensuring quiet to the kingdom, and though such a proposal would not

excite in him the horror which the modern world would expect, the probability is that he had at this time no intention of employing so ferocious a remedy for his difficulties.

At this critical juncture in the affairs of France and Navarre, the young Duke of Guise dared to cross the path of his Royal master. The history of the old days, when Bourbon and Guise were rivals for Jeanne's hand, was to some extent enacted over again, only this time young Guise was the lady's favourite and Antoine's son not even visible in the lists of love. It is related that the young Duke of Guise was so successful in touching the heart of Marguerite, now a girl of eighteen, that at dead of night she met him by appointment in a remote apartment of the Louvre. The lovers had so much to say that gradually the kindly darkness melted away, and, bereft of its veil, their folly, their daring, became suddenly apparent to some vigilant courtier, who ran to the King with the glad tidings which might be the ruin of Guise, if not of the lady. Charles, as was ever his wont when a sudden emergency demanded action, ran to his mother. Marguerite was hurried to the Royal presence, and the unfortunate Princess was soundly chastised for her indiscretion. Charles protested that Guise should pay for his share in the affair with his life, and, as good as his word, he charged Henry d'Angoulême, the Grand Prior, to kill the youth during a hunting-party. Luckily for Guise, the Grand Prior had too much conscience or too little nerve for the mission. And meanwhile François de Balzac, who had received

a hint of what was intended, whispered into Guise's ear a word that put him on his guard. The young Duke was a man of discretion as well as gallantry. He had no mind to die at that early stage of his career for the love of Marguerite Valois. He therefore consulted his mother on how best to appease the King's wrath. That wise woman assured him that instant marriage with some other lady was the only way. A beautiful young widow in the person of the Princess Porcein was luckily ready to save Guise's life on such terms. She was deeply enamoured of the young Duke, and, far from considering her pride wounded by that precipitate offer of his hand, she agreed to a wedding at an hour's notice, and between dusk and dawn was wooed and wedded. For the time being the Grand Prior might put away his dagger ; the Princess Porcein had rendered murder unnecessary, and had earned the right to be received with high favour at Court.

Marguerite's indiscretion had warned the King that if he was to accomplish his pet project of marrying her to Jeanne's son, no time should be lost. Not every cavalier might show himself so prudent as Guise ; not every widow so accommodating, so amiable, as Madame de Porcein. Ambassadors were therefore sent to Rochelle to discuss the matter, as well as various points connected with the Treaty of St. Germain. Jeanne evaded a definite reply. She dare not say openly that she hated the idea of such a marriage ; all she might do was to put off the evil day as long as possible—to put it off altogether if she could. She therefore sent envoys to Court,

commissioned to debate the French proposals, but without authority to arrange anything. They were also to put forward proposals of their own. Amongst others they were to ask for the recall to the Chancellorship of l'Hôpital, and for the banishment of the Guises from Court.

And now Rochelle had a wedding of its own which doubtless had some influence on the course of Jeanne's immediate history. Coligny, a staid widower, the father of grown-up children, the grizzled veteran of many wars, married again. Jacqueline d'Entremont, a young and wealthy widow of Savoy, had lost her husband at the battle of Dreux. Coligny's exploits made him her idol; and to the nobles of Savoy who would take possession of her hand and fortune she not only turned a deaf ear but made no secret of her admiration for the Huguenot chief. One fine day the Duke of Savoy sent her orders to wed one of his vassals. Her liege's tyranny fired the widow to instant action. If to marry Coligny involved disobedience to her Prince and martyrdom for herself, then the notion of such an alliance became irresistible. If it cost her her life, he should be hers! She steadfastly refused to marry the Duke of Savoy's candidate, and the moment peace was declared she left her home and sought Rochelle on a campaign, a conquest, of her own. As the penalty of her rebellion, the Duke of Savoy deprived her of her estates, so that Jacqueline arrived at Rochelle, a persecuted dame, reduced to penury for fidelity to a man she had never seen. Jeanne, ever the patroness of rebels, so long as their revolt was not against her

own authority, took her under her protection, and when Coligny pledged her his troth she was there to smile upon the bridegroom who had learned to prize her constancy in many a desperate need.

It was in February 1571 that Jacqueline realised the dream of years and became, as she said, the "Martia of her Cato." And now her husband, the Admiral of France, like his King, was weary of war. He had taken to himself a wife whose sufferings and devotion were the theme of universal laudation. He would taste with her the joys of home and quietude. With her too, perhaps, he would gladly return for a while, as well a bridegroom might, to the revels of the Court to which he had so long been a stranger. The sunshine that Jacqueline had brought him would be all the brighter if the favour of his King was his once more. Of all his battles nothing remained to him but the wounds; to his country nothing but mourning. The face of the land had indeed been transformed by war. Its noblest houses were in mourning. Their chiefs, the champions of his youth, were all gone, leaving in their place but babes and striplings. In the streets of once flourishing towns the grass now grew green, fertilised by the blood of their citizens. The beasts of the forest roamed at will the once smiling landscape. His sword had wrought havoc enough for one man's lifetime; he would draw it no more.

When they heard at Rochelle that Coligny was about to quit the Huguenot stronghold for the Court, his friends besought him to alter his mind. But even Jeanne's entreaties, her warnings, failed to move

him from his purpose. And in June 1571 the gallant old warrior threw himself at the feet of King Charles and craved his Royal master's pardon for all the battles he had won over his Majesty's generals. Coligny was overwhelmed with favour.

"My father!—my father!" were the cordial words with which the King greeted him.

At once his place in the Council was restored to him and a gift of one hundred thousand crowns made him out of the Royal treasury. Catharine de' Medici was no less gracious than her son. The whole Royal Family seemed to have fallen in love with the old man. Their caresses charmed away all his fears, obliterated the memory of all the warnings they had given him at Rochelle. Once indeed the King dropped some words that did excite his apprehensions.

"We have you now, my father!" cried Charles gaily. "You will not escape at will!"

For a moment visions of treachery assailed him. But the King looked so frank and sincere, his favours were so many and so tangible, that an instant's reflection dissipated them, and the veteran was serene again. Like everybody else, Coligny soon fell in love with Madame Marguerite; to him the girl seemed an ideal consort for the young Prince of Navarre. To Jeanne he wrote:

"Concerning the Princess, Madame, be assured that she will have no will but that of her brother the King, and, obedient sister and daughter, she will submit to all that is required of her. She is most witty, her temper is kind, supple, docile, her mind is penetrating

and enlightened. Why should she not, therefore, Madame, end by inclining her ear to the truth, and by accepting from conviction the faith professed by her future husband and her mother-in-law?"

Meanwhile Jeanne, instead of proceeding to the Louvre, had gone to Pau, where Coligny again wrote to her that King Charles would smooth every obstacle to the wedding, "even that of religious prejudice." But Jeanne was a mistress of the art of spinning out the web of negotiation, and no definite word of encouragement rewarded Coligny's effusions.

King Charles therefore, at the commencement of 1572, sent a formal embassy to Pau to obtain a final answer on various matters connected with the peace, but above all to learn the fate of his scheme for making Huguenot and Catholic friends for ever, by wedding his sister with their chief. The embassy, over which Biron presided, carried many proofs of the sincerity of the French King, for practically all Jeanne's demands were conceded.

The crisis had now come which, as events proved, was to determine the fate of the Prince and Princess. Jeanne referred the project to her Council, and the Council, alas for Marguerite! were also in love with her. They would have her for the Prince's wife, and in doing so they condemned her by high decree to lifelong misery and eternal dishonour.

Arros, Grammont, Mortamar, Francourt—they were all for the daughter of France. Prince Henry himself took sides with them. Jeanne might have resisted the Council; Henry she could not resist. A

Queen of iron will to all the rest of the world, a soldier, a despot—to her children she was only a woman, and she could not gainsay the whim of this boy whom she adored.

“Alas!” she cried, in her bitter chagrin, “I expect little from my friends!”

Forthwith she embraced the inevitable. But she made one important reservation that must have tried Henry's obedience sorely.

She announced to the Council her intention of proceeding to Court at once to negotiate the marriage articles. “But,” she added, “my son will stay in Bearn until I summon him hence.”

Henry therefore was left behind, and, accompanied by her daughter, Jeanne set out for the Court.

At this time the King was, to all seeming, almost entirely under the influence of the Huguenots. The Duke of Guise and his brother the Duke of Mayenne had withdrawn from Court. So too had the Duke of Montpensier and his son, and a little later the Cardinal de Lorraine followed their example. There can, indeed, be but little doubt that the King thought seriously of reversing his mother's policy ; of breaking off the alliance with Philip of Spain, and of asserting the claims of France in the Low Countries, assisted by the arms of England and of the Protestant Princes of the Empire.

The Court was at Blois, but the Queen-Mother and her suite advanced to Tours, and there Jeanne was received with every mark of consideration. As in former days, Catharine de' Medici was still the central figure on the stage ; the King could never

quite escape from her long tutelage. For years he had been bound hand and foot, and when they had severed his bonds it hardly made any difference to him, for he could not use his limbs and stand alone! He trifled with politics and politicians. But it was his mother's policy that availed, his mother's politicians that ruled.

It was with Catharine that Jeanne now opened negotiations. Jeanne wished the marriage to proceed by proxy, and that Marguerite should then be conducted to her bridegroom at Pau. Catharine desired that the pair should be married at Court, and should reside there for a great part of the year, and that the Princess should be allowed the free exercise of her religion. In a word, they would make young Henry a Frenchman; they would make him forget, in the luxurious atmosphere of the Louvre, the land that had first claim upon his life and love, and the religion for which his mother had mortgaged half her years and prepared for herself an early grave.

Jeanne was so indignant at Catharine's proposals that she rejected them unreservedly.

De Rosny, afterwards famous as her son's adviser, had accompanied Jeanne to Blois. When his mistress told him what had been proposed, he advised her to quit the Court at once.

"If these nuptials are ever celebrated," he said, "the liveries will be blood-coloured!"

And blood-coloured they were to be!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE QUEEN DETHRONED!

JEANNE had no sooner laid eyes upon Marguerite than she too fell in love with her exquisite beauty. She realised at once that the most powerful influence in France was Marguerite's smile. If the charm of her loveliness was to be employed as a political force, nothing could withstand it. Jeanne at the same time realised that, should her son come to Court, there would be an end of the negotiations. Marguerite need but look upon him, and he was conquered. Catharine might offer what terms she pleased, she could but accept them. She therefore wrote to him a letter that was at once a warning, a eulogy of his Princess, and a picture of the manners of the Court :

“The long account,” she wrote, “that I have already sent you of the discourse which I held with the Queen and Madame renders it needless for me to write a long letter, as I am sorry that I cannot yet impart any decisive resolution. I perceive, by what you have written me, that you are journeying towards Tartas, as we had resolved ; but as it appears that our affairs here have still to be settled, both by

the pen and the eye, I pray and command you not to quit Bearn until you have received another dispatch from me: if you have already travelled some way, devise an expedient to return upon your steps, as you may easily do. This is my advice, and that of all here who understand how things are. Nothing is talked of at Court but to bring you hither speedily, even before we have concluded anything, which, the Queen has said to me three times, depends solely upon your decision and will. . . .

“I must inform you that Madame Marguerite has given me every honour and welcome in her power to bestow; she has frankly owned to me the agreeable idea which she has formed of you. With her beauty and wit she exercises great influence with the Queen-Mother, the King, and with her younger brothers. Should she embrace our faith, I may say it will be the most fortunate event in the world; for not only our house, but the entire realm of France, will partake in this happiness, judging from the prudence and wisdom which she already displays. . . .

“My sister the Princess [widow of Condé] and my niece are here. . . . I find them both much changed; they have assumed airs which I esteem as extraordinary as they are disagreeable. If you cannot make love with better grace than your cousin [the young Prince Condé], I counsel you to leave the matter alone. . . .”¹

A little later Catharine, accompanied by Jeanne, proceeded to Blois. There she was received by the

¹ Freer's "Life."

King and young Elizabeth of Austria and all the brilliant Court to which she had so long been a stranger. Still in early middle life, how far off seemed the days, spoken of by Brantôme, when her chief delight in life was to lead the dance!

The following day the negotiations were resumed, Catharine again playing the chief part. The conversation was no less unsatisfactory than that which had taken place at Tours. On the 8th of March she again wrote to her son that everything was different from what she had expected. The promises which she had read into the messages sent her at Bearn were all unfulfilled, nor was there any hope of mending matters. The treatment meted out to Jeanne at this period, if her letters are a faithful diary of events, would seem to indicate that the Court despaired of coming to terms with her. Catharine played with her; Marguerite she rarely saw alone; the King had neither the patience nor the genius necessary to persuade such a woman as Jeanne to adopt his views, or to weary her into adopting them if persuasion was in vain.

The latter was the method that seemed to recommend itself to Catharine. Jeanne, she knew, was as immovable as her native mountains when once she had made up her mind. Yet the marriage was, to her mind, impossible on Jeanne's terms. Though she laughed and jested gaily at their conferences, and tried to keep up the pretence that they were making progress with the business, she was really in despair at finding herself face to face with a granite rock. In her perplexity she is said to have applied to Tavannes

to counsel her how to read the true mind of the Queen of Navarre.

"Put her in a passion, Madame," said the Marshal, "and keep yourself cool. Then you will learn everything from her. That is the way to manage women."¹

Catharine seems to have followed the advice of the Marshal to some extent, for Jeanne wrote to the Prince a bitter complaint of the contemptuous levity of the Queen-Mother's treatment :

"Nothing progresses," she complained, "and they do all in their power to make me come to a precipitate decision, instead of conducting affairs with order and gravity. I have remonstrated upon three separate occasions with the Queen ; but she ridicules me, and afterwards states to every one just the very contrary to that which I said ; therefore, when many of our friends blame me, I know not well how to contradict the Queen, for when I venture to say to her Majesty, ' Madame, it is reported that I have said such and such things to you,' although she it was who herself spread the statement, she denies it, laughing in my face, and treating me in such shameful fashion, that you may believe my patience surpasses that of Griselda herself. . . .

"If you could realise the distress and anxiety which I suffer, you would pity me ; for they treat me with the greatest rigour, and with foolish discourse and ridicule, instead of negotiating as the gravity of the subject merits ; so that I have great difficulty in repressing my wrath. I have, however, resolved not

¹ Sismondi, "Hist. des Français."

to be irritated ; and the patience which I demonstrate is miraculous ; but I know that if I have hitherto had occasion for forbearance, I shall still more need it. I fear that I shall soon fall ill with anxiety, as already my health is failing greatly. . . ."

Jeanne's pathetic fear that soon she would fail beneath her burden was indeed a premonition of the end. While they were laughing at this strange Griselda, she was in truth dying. At last the King himself had mercy on her. He ordered a Commission to take up the negotiations and see what could be done to reconcile the irreconcilable.

By this time Jeanne was in despair. To her it seemed certain that the honour thrust upon her House would infallibly be its ruin. A few years before she would have relieved her anxieties by flight or some such daring expedient. But now she was in a morass from which she had neither the strength nor the address to escape. If only they would quarrel with her and let her go ! But that was not to be. The easy-going King had suddenly become the personification of iron purpose. In this desire of his heart, no power on earth should thwart him. His mother had failed, the Commission had failed. To the devil with negotiations ! He knew a better way. His Majesty decreed that all conditions should be dispensed with ; and that arrangements for the marriage should proceed forthwith. Henry himself should come for his bride, and if any bargaining there should be, it could proceed at leisure after this marriage in haste.

Then, at the eleventh hour, a new difficulty arose :

the Pope refused a dispensation. For once Jeanne recognised in his Holiness a true friend. If only the Pope would hold out, she might still escape from this alliance. But the King's blood was up, and in valiant mood he exclaimed to Jeanne:

"No, no! my aunt. I honour you more than the Pope, and I love my sister more than I fear his Holiness. I am not a Huguenot, but neither am I a fool. If the Pope behaves too absurdly in this affair, I will take Margot by the hand and have her married in Huguenot fashion!"¹

The King had no need, however, to make good his boastful jest. The dispensation arrived in due course, and immediately Jeanne advised her son to come to Paris, whither she had preceded him.

When last in Paris, her chief anxiety had been lest her son should not be permitted to depart with her. Now, at her command, he was returning once more to thrust his head within the lion's jaws! Under the familiar roof of the Hôtel de Condé she took up her abode, and day by day the weary, anxious, baffled woman went from shop to shop, buying rare and beautiful gifts for her son and for his bride. The Parisians loved to be dazzled. If gold and jewels and gorgeous finery could purchase their goodwill, then would Henry and Marguerite be taken to their hearts!

Amongst other shops visited by Jeanne was that of René, famous as the Queen-Mother's perfumer. Here she purchased drugs and perfumes, ruffs and gloves. Then she returned to the Hôtel de Condé, and Paris beheld her no more.

¹ Freer's "Life."

All that night she tossed upon a fevered bed. In a day or two all Paris knew that she was ill, and the cry was raised that she had been poisoned, that René, the wonder-worker, the mysterious René, had had his chance and had done his Royal mistress a favour that would never be forgotten to him. It was the cry of an ignorant, a credulous, and a fanatical age. The poison working in Jeanne's blood had not been absorbed under René's roof. It was of origin more remote, more insidious. It was the poison of carking care, year in and year out, ravaging her desolated heart.

Lying in agony, Jeanne knew that the long battle was nearing its close. Valiantly had she striven for the lad who was still far away, so valiantly that none had known or cared that the woman's blood was growing cold, that only a gossamer thread bound her to life. Like a soldier she had played her part. Wounds had had no power over her. The ceaseless inroads of disease she had defied. Death alone could match himself against this Lioness. And now he was here, on the threshold. Yet the woman quailed not. Let Death come, since barred it could not be!

"I have never feared death," she said, "still less dare I murmur at the dispensations of Providence. . . . Nevertheless, I grieve deeply to leave the children whom God has given me, in their tender age, exposed to so many dangers and such adversity. . . . In God's providence I confide!"

When Antoine had lain on his bed of death, dancing girls had come to distract him: he would be saved from himself. But Jeanne begged no

sedative, no distraction. With eyes wide open, she would wait for the eclipse. Bravely she spoke of the future in which she would have no part, the future lying beyond the grave, when Navarre would have lost its chieftainess, and nothing should remain to her children but the memory of her words. Her tenderest message was for her little girl. Henry was a man; he could take care of himself. He had a will of his own, a will that was not always hers, and a sword that was as ready as his tongue.

"Tell Catharine," she said to her daughter's governess, "that her dying mother implored her to repose a firm and constant trust in God; to be obedient to her brother, and to her preceptress, who, both of them, will guide her steps through the danger which besets her. Let her receive their counsels as if I myself spoke them. . . . Tell my beloved child that I solemnly confide her to the care of Almighty God, Who will protect and bless her, if she offers Him faithful service."¹

As the end approached, her ladies were bathed in tears. Jeanne had wept tears of blood for many a year, tears that sapped the life in her veins, but in this supreme moment her eyes were undimmed.

"Ought you to weep for me?" she said. "You have all witnessed the miserable wretchedness of my past life. Ought you to weep when, at length, God takes pity upon me, and calls me to the enjoyment of a blessed existence, for which I have unceasingly prayed?"

On the 4th of June 1572 she had taken to her

¹ Freer's "Life."

bed of pain. She so wanted rest! Yet with nothing done of all that she had set out to do, it was still too soon for rest. The better half of her kingdom was still in the hands of Spain; the destiny of the other half was at the mercy of France. Her children were the playthings of Fortune. Of all the vows that she had registered, none had been realised—and now never would be. . . . On the morning of the 9th, between eight and nine o'clock, a change overspread the dying woman's countenance. The grim Courier keeping vigil during those cheerless days in the ante-chamber was getting ready to be gone. The appointed hour was at hand. Presently he would beckon her away! A smile, they say, played an instant around her pallid lips. Of late years she had but seldom smiled. Now she would do so no more. . . . Friend or foe, vassal or suzerain, was hers no longer. Jeanne d'Albret's proud heart was at rest in her bosom. The terrible Queen of Navarre was dethroned. . . .

Then by and by to the Hôtel de Condé came a gorgeous cavalcade. It was a party of great ladies and gentlemen from the Louvre, come to pay homage to the Warrior-Queen. Amongst them was the young girl whom Jeanne had so quickly learned to love, and whose heart of clay she was saved the misery of knowing in all its pitiful worthlessness. Marguerite of Valois stood by the bier where lay, all clothed in glistening white satin, the dust of this strange woman who had allowed the world to break her heart. The bed of mourning state, the grave-clothes of white, the mantle of violet velvet thrown

as a pall over the sleeping Queen, the black draperies hanging all round from ceiling to floor, the lonely crown so near the brow that would know no more the glories of earth, the eloquent sceptre so near yet so remote from the hand that had done with power for ever, made up a picture of woe, a tableau of wisdom and of desolation, that Marguerite of Valois, of all women in France, should fly from in terror.

But she had a duty to fulfil. And it should be done, for was she not to have been a daughter to this dethroned Queen? And so she remained a few brief moments in silent, farewell homage by her kinswoman's bier. Then turning on her heel, she gladly left behind her those haunting black draperies and that dread vision of white and violet, for the eternal brightness of the Paris streets and the joyous midsummer sunshine.

Through these same streets, a little later, they carried the departed Queen. The gates of Paris were thrown open to give her egress. At last alarms were stilled, intrigues were hushed. Who now would bid her stay? On once more to Vendôme! There, in accordance with her last injunctions, they laid her to rest, the unchangeable one, in the tomb that held the dust of her adored, her worthless l'Échangeur.

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